

S E R M O N S

ON

DIFFERENT SUBJECTS,

BY THE LATE REVEREND

J O H N J O R T I N, D. D.

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S E R M O N

ИЗДАНИЕ

1890

LIVE FROM THE

But other things are going on here
which I do not want to say.

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ИЗДАНИЕ

[illegible]

2 E R M O N X I X

The following are the names of the persons who have been killed in the recent disturbances in the city of London.

1945

1860

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LUKE xi. 1.

And it came to pass that as he was praying in a certain place, when he ceased, one of his disciples said unto him, Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples. And he said unto them, When ye pray, say, Our Father, &c.

IN the history of our Saviour's life, it may be observed, that no reasonable request was ever made to him, which he did not grant; and no prudent question, which he did not answer and resolve. Of all the requests which are recorded in the New Testament, this in the Text may be accounted one of the most just and judicious; Lord, teach us to pray. The imperfection of the best, and the ignorance of the wisest is such, that, if left to themselves, they would have doubts concerning the things to be asked, and the effects to be expected from their petitions. Therefore this Disciple is

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greatly

greatly to be commended, who neglected not the opportunity of obtaining instruction in so important a point from the mouth of Divine Wisdom itself.

We learn from the Gospel of St. Matthew, that our Saviour, before he delivered this form of prayer, discoursed to his disciples concerning the duty of private prayer, and exhorted them to avoid some faults relating to it. The Jewish hypocrites said their prayers in the streets and places of concourse, to be seen of men, to get the character of devout persons, and to promote their own worldly interests. The Gentiles multiplied petitions for things temporal, without any devotion, without a due reverence and submission to the divine will. These indecent follies he strictly forbids: he reminds them, that God knoweth the things of which they have need, before they ask him: that they ought not to lay their wants before him in a superfluous abundance of words, nor hope to extort his favour by such absurd methods. Then he proceeds to give them a form of prayer.

It hath been observed by Commentators, that this form is taken out of the Jewish Liturgies, that our Lord collected it thence, and

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put it together, and added nothing of his own, except these words, As we forgive them that trespass against us; that therefore he was far from affecting novelty, and rejecting any thing that was good, because it was in common use.

If these Jewish forms of prayer are indeed as old as they are said to be, which is doubtful, another observation might be also made, namely, that our Lord, when he had recited this prayer to his disciples, knowing that there was only one expression in it which might seem new to them, makes a particular remark upon it, saying immediately; For if ye forgive men their Trespases, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: but if ye forgive not men their Trespases, neither will your Father forgive your Trespases.

When our Lord gave this prayer to his disciples, it was not his intention that they should use no other than this in their private devotions, much less, that they should neglect the public worship of God, and the stated prayers of the Church, to which, as it appears from the New Testament, both he and his disciples conformed. But the Jewish doctors had used to draw up a form of private prayer for themselves and for their disciples; and John the Baptist,

as St. Luke occasionally informs us, had given one to his followers; and conformably to this custom of Teachers, our Lord, at the request of his disciples, gave them this, to add to their petitions; for it is not to be supposed, that when they prayed to God, they always confined themselves to the Lord's prayer; and indeed our Saviour afterwards gave his disciples new directions concerning prayer, bidding them ask in his name.

But since our Lord ordered his disciples to make use of this form of words, as these expressions imply; So therefore pray ye; and, When ye pray, say; and since it is to be concluded that they complied with his precept, and repeated this prayer at certain times, the silence of the Scriptures being no proof to the contrary; and since the Church hath made use of it from very ancient times; and since this prayer is most excellent, as every Christian must acknowledge; upon these accounts, and for the sake of Him who gave it, it becomes us to insert it in our more solemn addresses, and also to account it a pattern and model for all our prayers, to ask for such things as are contained in it, and to make no petitions which are not consistent with it.

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Some persons, who have been fond of extemporary prayers, have carried their aversion from stated forms so far as to slight even the Lord's prayer, and to shun the use of it. They have objected to us, the repetition of it in our Liturgy; a repetition which, to say the plain truth, is too frequent. But that was not the fault of the Compilers of the Liturgy; it is to be ascribed to our joining together different Services, which were originally intended to be used at different times, or hours.

The Lord's Prayer begins with an address to God, as to our heavenly Father; and with three petitions, or rather pious wishes, that his name may be hallowed, that his Kingdom may come, and that his will may be done on earth as it is in heaven.

God is called Father, as he is our Creator, and thereby the Father of all things in the universe, particularly of all intellectual beings, and of all men. Their Father he is, both because he made them, and because they in some measure resemble him. He is also Father, as he is the preserver of all, upholding and supporting them by his power and providence. He is also our Father in a more excellent sense, by vocation and adoption, having called us to him by Jesus

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Christ,

Christ, through faith in whom we become children of God, and are his family on earth; as the Angels are his family in heaven.

By calling God, Father, we are reminded of his paternal readiness to hear our reasonable requests, to grant us the things which are good, though we may not have a right apprehension of them, and to withhold from us the things which are hurtful, if by mistake we should wish for them. Not only, if we ask him bread, he will not give us a scorpion; but if we ignorantly ask him a scorpion, he will give us bread.

By calling him Father, we are reminded of that reverence for him, that fear of offending him, that desire of pleasing him, that zeal for his honour, that endeavour to resemble him, and that submission to his dispensations, which, as his children, we ought to entertain.

By calling him Our Father, that is, our common Parent, we learn what affection we ought to bear to our brethren, that is, to all men, who, as well as we, are his children by creation or adoption.

It is added, Who art in heaven; an appellation of God frequently used by the Jews. Not as if God were there only, or so particularly there, as not to be equally every where
in

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in essence, in power, and in knowledge ; but because his presence there is more gloriously manifested. By the same expression is also signified in Scripture his perfect knowledge of every thing, his excellent majesty, his supreme, irresistible power, and his dominion over all.

Thus these first words, which are a preface to the prayer, are proper to produce in us worthy notions of God, and to raise our hope and reliance, our veneration and love.

By the name of God, which we wish may be hallowed, is meant the divine Majesty, God himself, as he is known to us by his perfections. We may be said to hallow the name of God, that is, to sanctify or to glorify God, when we entertain in our hearts a right opinion of him, particularly of his moral perfections, as they are called, that is, of his perfect goodness, and justice, and purity, and mercy, and have a lively and lasting sense of them upon our minds, which produces a suitable behaviour towards him.

We sanctify him, when we declare this our belief, and acknowledge these perfections of God by speaking of him upon all proper occasions in such a manner as becomes us, and by offering up prayers and praises to him. We

sanctify him, when our actions correspond with such thoughts and such expressions, and we obediently keep his commandments.

The kingdom of God may be taken in three different senses :

First, his absolute and general dominion over the universe, which was created for his pleasure, which is preserved by his providence, and which depends upon him for its continuance.

This cannot be the kingdom of God mentioned in the Lord's prayer, the coming of which we should desire ; for it hath been present, from the beginning, in all times and in all places, and cannot be enlarged or diminished by the behaviour of any of his creatures. We cannot therefore pray or wish for its coming : we can indeed and we ought to rejoice that it is always present, that the Lord reigneth, and that his kingdom is over all, and that we are not exposed to the cruel tyranny of Chance or Fate, or of imperfect and wicked beings, but that all things are governed by an almighty and most gracious God.

Secondly, The kingdom of God means his government over rational creatures, to whom he gives laws, and who obey him, not
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by constraint, but freely and by choice. This kingdom may be resisted, and is daily resisted by evil spirits, and by wicked men. And as this kingdom may be opposed, so it may be increased by the conversion of the disobedient from sin to righteousness.

As our Lord came into the world to destroy the works of the Devil, and to promote virtue and obedience to God, the religion of Christ and the state of the Gospel is in the Scripture frequently called the kingdom of God; and this is what is chiefly meant by it in the Lord's Prayer. By praying, therefore, that God's kingdom may come, we express a desire that the Gospel of Christ may spread and prevail over the world, may be every-where embraced and practised.

Thirdly, The kingdom of God in a more eminent and proper sense means that state to come, when Sin and Death shall be abolished, and the Saints shall reign with God in glory and happiness for ever; that kingdom which they shall inherit who are subjects to the present kingdom of Christ, and obey his laws. The kingdom of God in the New Testament usually means both these kingdoms, for they are in some manner one and the same kingdom,

kingdom, and an entrance and continuance in the first leads us to an inheritance in the latter.

By praying then that God's kingdom may come, we pray also and wish for that happy time when we shall have no more to do with this vain and wicked world; when the glorious kingdom of God shall come, new heavens and a new earth, the seat of everlasting peace and righteousness.

By the will of God is not meant what he purposes and resolves to do; for that he will do in heaven and on earth, whether his creatures approve of it or no. But the will of God, in this place, means his desire of being obeyed by rational and free beings, in whose power he leaves it to comply or not. This will of God is done in heaven by the holy Angels, who are his ministers to do his pleasure, and who perform their duty to him readily and cheerfully. When we pray therefore that God's will may be done on earth as it is in heaven, we wish that all men, imitating the blessed spirits above, may sincerely and carefully serve their Creator.

It is to be observed that in the Lord's Prayer we in the first place wish that the name of God

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God may be hallowed, that his kingdom may come, and that his will may be done on earth as it is in heaven; in all which there is nothing that relates directly, immediately, and particularly to our own persons. Hereby we are taught each of us to know and acknowledge ourselves to be what we are, a small and inconsiderable part of the creation; to place things in their true order, and to regulate our desires according to the dictates of reason. The honour and glory of almighty God, who is the Creator, Father, and Preserver of all, is to be preferred to every thing else; therefore it is to be first sought and desired by us: the obedient behaviour of all his creatures, by which his honour is promoted and their happiness is secured and increased, stands next; and our own interest, though it be included in the good of the whole, of which we are a part, is not yet distinctly mentioned. But after we have prayed that God may be honoured by the obedience of all his creatures, we are permitted to offer up some petitions relating more immediately to ourselves, though not to ourselves alone; and they are, that God would give us our daily bread, that he would forgive us our trespasses,

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that

that he would not lead us into temptation, and that he would deliver us from evil.

By bread^s is meant, not what disorderly fancy, and foolish custom, and pride, and luxury, and vanity may have made in a manner necessary to many of us; but those things which are really necessary for the support of human nature, those good things of this life, which God created for our use, and to be received with thanksgiving, those things which our heavenly Father knoweth to be needful for us, and which he hath promised to them who seek first the kingdom of God and the righteousness thereof. This is the bread which we are permitted to ask of God, and we must ask that he would give it us this day, or day by day, that is, not all at once such a quantity of things necessary as may last us our whole life, not treasures laid up for many years, but a constant and moderate provision dealt out to us in proportion to our exigencies, and sufficient to supply our necessities during this life.

This is a petition which it behoves us to put up constantly to God, how flourishing soever our circumstances may be, remembering the fickle state of worldly things, and the folly
of

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of placing our confidence in any creature, and the insufficiency of abundance, and power, and friends, and health, and diligence, and prudence, and the brightest abilities, without God's blessing, which is promised to those, who, whilst they are honestly industrious in their callings, rely entirely upon his paternal care and support.

The general sense then of the petition is plain; but the words, daily bread, are not so clear, and might perhaps be better rendered, to-morrow's bread: Give us this day bread for the * morrow. This may, at first sight, seem to contradict the precept of our Saviour, wherein he bids us take no care for the morrow. But, first; the care which he condemns, is an anxious care, accompanied with a distrust of Providence; secondly, petitions, of their own nature, look forwards, and are for something to come; and thirdly, we only ask for

* Daily bread. *ἐπιούσιον*. 'H ἐπιούσιον is the morrow; as in Euripides—*ἐπιούσιον λαμπρὰ δὲ*, is *lux postera*. Med. 352.

Jerom on *Matt. vi. 11.* says, *In Evangelio quod appellatur Secundum Hebræos, pro supersubstantiali pane, reperi machar, quod dicitur crastinum: ut sit sensus, panem nostrum crastinum, id est, futurum da nobis hodie.*

Other ancient Versions use words which answer to *crastinus*, or *futurus*.

bread

bread from this day to the morrow, that is, bread for four and twenty hours, which is in reality only one day's bread.

By praying that God would forgive us our trespasses, we are reminded that we all of us offend him, more or less, and in many things fall short of our duty; that yet we are sinners by our own fault, and must not charge our transgressions upon a fatal necessity, or a natural impossibility of doing better; that therefore our sins justly deserve punishment, unless God be pleased mercifully to remit that punishment; that he is placable and ready to be appeased upon our repentance; that we should daily desire his forgiveness; that our devotions should be founded on humility; and that when we pray to God for spiritual or temporal blessings, we ought at the same time to have a due sense of our own unworthiness, and meekly to acknowledge it.

Our Lord hath also taught us not to expect forgiveness, unless we forgive those who trespass against us; and this he hath repeated several times, lest we should deceive ourselves in a point so important. He obliges us to affirm before God, who knoweth our hearts, that we are in charity with all men, as often as

we

we ask mercy from him; so that if we are not in this temper, we are reduced to the hard necessity and condition either of not offering up our prayers to God, or of indirectly asking him to punish us.

We must forgive those who trespass against us. And if we really forgive them, we must be free from designs and desires of revenging ourselves upon them; we must wish that they may repent and return to a better mind; we must be ready to do them such good offices as humanity and charity require, howsoever they be disposed towards us; and we must shew them still more favour, if they humbly own their fault, and amend, and seek to be reconciled.

Great is the encouragement which our Lord hath given us to practise this patient and compassionate virtue. If ye forgive men, says he, their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. This promise however is not to be so extensively understood, as if this act of obedience alone could secure to us the favour of God, though we should neglect the rest of our duty. Thus much indeed may be justly hoped and fairly concluded, that he who hath received considerable injuries, and from his heart

heart forgives them, will probably by the good disposition of his own mind, and by the blessing and assistance of God, perform whatsoever is necessary to his improvement and salvation.

The next petition is, that God would not lead us into temptation, in which if we attend to the bare sound, and reflect not upon the sense of it, we may fall into unworthy notions of God's providence.

It is often said, upon this subject, that temptations are of two sorts; first, trials of our obedience, intended for our benefit; secondly, enticements to sin, which seduce us from our duty. But this seems not to set the matter in a true light; the distinction is scarcely just. All temptations are of the same sort: they are difficulties which arise in certain circumstances and situations, when reason and duty require one thing, and inclination and passion suggest another. As to the * event indeed, sometimes the man overcomes the temptation, and sometimes the temptation overcomes the man.

* To be tempted, sometimes means, to be exposed to temptation; and sometimes it means, to be overcome by temptation. See Whitby and Grotius on Galat. vi. 1.

Concerning

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Concerning this expression, Lead us not into temptation, it is to be observed, that to be led into temptation, and to enter into temptation, in the language of the Scriptures, signify to be overcome by it. When therefore we pray to God that he would not lead us into temptation, we desire that he would not place us in circumstances, wherein we shall be overcome by the temptation.

But as this may seem to make God the author and the cause of our sins, it must be always remembered that he cannot lead us into temptation by putting evil inclinations in us, or by inciting or enticing us to sin, or by laying us under a necessity of committing it, or by giving evil spirits any power over our will.

Let no man say, when he is tempted, I am tempted of God, for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man. But in the language of the Scripture, whatsoever God permits to be done, or to come to pass, that he is sometimes said to do. He may then, according to this way of speech, be said to lead us into temptation, when, because we have abused his long suffering and his kind offers of assistance, or because we rashly seek danger through presumption and

self-conceit, or because our hearts are dead to things spiritual, he leaves us to ourselves, and withdraws that assistance which he would have continued to us, if we had asked him for it in a due manner, and done our part in working out our Salvation. When such is our case, and we have forced God to forsake us, we shall as surely be overcome by temptation, as if God himself had led us into it, and subjected us to its influence. Therefore when we pray that God would not lead us into temptation, we beseech him that he would not suffer us, for the punishment of our sins, to be deprived of his aid, and to fall into circumstances which will prove destructive to us.

We pray that God would not lead us into temptation: we pray also that he would deliver us from evil, that is, from the evil of sin, which is the consequence of yielding to temptation. Or, deliver us from evil, may mean, deliver us from the evil One, from Satan. As the holy Spirit of God is ever willing to succour those who desire to be led by him, and to do the will of God, and as the Angels are sent to minister to the righteous, and delight in the employment; so the Scripture represents the evil One as no less industrious to tempt, and

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and to entice men to sin. However, all that Satan can do is only to tempt : he hath no power over our persons, or our wills, nor can his allurements hurt, unless we by our own choice yield to them ; so that the treachery of our own corrupt hearts is more dangerous than he, or any enemy from without.

The Lord's Prayer is closed with an acknowledgment of God, that his is the kingdom and the power and the glory for ever and ever.

This doxology, or praise given to God, is not to be found in St. Luke's Gospel, and it seems not to have been originally in the Lord's Prayer, as given us by St. Matthew. It is left out in our Common Prayer-book, in some places of the Morning and Evening Services. It was used in the primitive Church, and in ancient times, in their Liturgy, when the Lord's Prayer was repeated, and at the conclusion of it, and thence it came to be annexed to it afterwards. However, as it is entirely agreeable to the holy Scriptures, both in words and in sense, we need not scruple to make use of it. It may be thus applied to the foregoing words :

We pray, O God, that thy kingdom may come, that thy name may be hallowed, and that thy will may be done on earth ; for thine

is the kingdom, to thee belongeth dominion, and it is the indispensible duty of all men to honour thee, and their happiness consists in obeying thy holy laws. We pray to thee for daily bread, for the necessities of life, for temporal blessings to be derived from thee the fountain of good, for the remission of sins through thy mercy, and for preservation from them for the time to come, through thy mighty protection; for thine is the power thus to supply our wants, and to keep us from all evil, and to pardon offences. For all these things we pray to thee; for if we do thus our duty to thee by hallowing thy name, and owning thy kingdom, and acting according to thy will, and if thou vouchsafe to pardon and protect us, thine will be the glory for ever and ever. Amen.

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S E R M O N II.

PHILIPP. iv. 11.

*I have learned in whatsoever state I am, there-
with to be content.*

IF content ariseth from pleasure, and discon-
tent from pain, and if the mind be exposed
to receive impressions of pleasure and pain from
the things which surround it, it seems to follow
that content cannot be taught or learned, and
that it depends not so much upon us, as upon
the circumstances in which we are placed.
But if there be pleasures which the mind can
secure to itself, and if God hath made us capa-
ble of acquiring blessings which outward objects
can neither give nor take away, the art of
being contented may be learned, and this hap-
py temper may be acquired.

There are many reasons for which we ought
to be contented, and there are certain means,

by the use of which we may learn to acquiesce in our condition, which I shall lay before you, after a few observations upon the nature of contentment.

1. There is no occasion to say much in its praise, and to persuade men that it deserves to be sought, and that they will find their account in it. Every one is desirous of it, and agrees in setting a just value upon it.

2. Some there are who possess all the necessities of life, and want no external helps to happiness, and yet are not satisfied, because their desires are extravagant and boundless. It would be a vain attempt to endeavour to teach such persons contentment, who have so many things to learn, and so many to unlearn, before they can hear reason upon this head.

3. It is not necessary that he who is contented in his state, should prefer that state to any other, or should never use any endeavours to mend his condition. A person may be contented, who has not some of the conveniences of life, and who is seeking to acquire them; but then he will not be uneasy without them, or afflicted and dejected if he should meet with disappointments in his pursuits. If he can obtain them, they will be welcome to him;

if

if he cannot, he will not be much disturbed about it.

4. Contentment, even in a prosperous situation, is a commendable quality, since it depends much upon goodness of heart, and a right temper of mind, and without them is not attainable in any condition : yet it must be confessed that when there is an affluence of all accommodations, it is no extraordinary accomplishment to be satisfied ; so that this virtue is better tried, and appears to more advantage when we are deprived of the things which are generally valued, and might be innocently enjoyed. This is the contentment on which we propose to discourse. St. Paul says in the text, that he had learned to be contented in all states. And what state was his ? The history of the Acts of the Apostles, and his own Epistles will inform us, that it was a state which to the greater part of men would be very unacceptable and very irksome.

5. Contentment, as it is a virtue, may be said to belong chiefly to a condition which is not the easiest, nor yet the hardest and most wretched. In sore calamities and extreme misery, there is another virtue very nearly related to contentment, which seems to take place,

namely, a patient resignation to the will of God, which hath in it every thing that is to be found in contentment, except cheerfulness.

6. Lastly, If every thing happens to us at present according to our desires, if God hath liberally poured down upon us temporal blessings, if we have friends, and health, and honour, and riches, and youth, yet we should study to acquire that most useful and excellent art of being contented in every state, and of preserving an even temper of mind under any change of circumstances ; for we know not how soon we may have occasion to practise this virtue, and we may be almost certain that such occasions will arise in the course of life, and in a state where nothing is of a fixed and permanent nature, Friends may die, and friendships may be dissolved, health may be soon and suddenly and irretrievably lost, promises may be broken, and kindnesses repaid with ingratitude, riches may make themselves wings, and take their flight, the favour of the world is uncertain, reputation is not always secured by innocence and desert, our best days steal silently and insensibly away, and others less agreeable succeed them.

I proceed

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I proceed now to offer some reasons for which we should be contented in our state, though it be exposed to inconveniences.

I. If we are uneasy *, impatient, angry, vexed, envious, querulous, and dejected, because we have not this or that which we think suitable for us, we act most absurdly, we add to our misery, we afflict ourselves to no purpose, we are our own enemies. If all sin be folly, if every bad disposition be irrational, discontent is so in a more eminent manner.

A greater stress should not be laid upon this argument than it will bear, and therefore we must acknowledge that considered by itself, and not seconded by other motives, it will

* Agamemnon is introduced by Homer, as tearing off his hair:

Πολλὰς ἐκ κεφαλῆς προθιδύμενος ἰσχυρὰ χεῖρας.

Upon which Bias made a jest, which is admired by Cicero. This foolish Prince, says Bias, pulls up his hair by the roots, as if baldness were a cure for trouble. *Perinde stultissimum regem in luctu capillum sibi evellere, quasi calvitio mæror levaretur.*

Yet it must be owned that these and the like extravagant actions give some ease to those persons whose passions are impetuous, and whose grief might kill them, if it had not such vent. It is a great weakness and meanness to be thus disordered; and philosophy, as well as religion, condemns it. But the Greek Poet, upon whom the ridicule seems to fall, deserves no blame for having represented men, in this respect, such as they often are.

Homer, Il. κ. 15. ε. 27. κ. 77. Cicero, Tusc. Disp. iii. 26.

hardly

hardly prove strong enough to calm a dissatisfied mind. And yet it hath its use, which is this; Since discontent is confessedly a very troublesome evil, which makes our condition worse than it would else be, the consideration of this should dispose us to use our utmost endeavours to overcome it, and patiently to listen to those arguments which may convince us of the wisdom and profitableness of the contrary temper.

II. Another motive to contentedness may be drawn from observations made upon the state of mankind, upon the evils and calamities with which this world at all times abounds. We cannot entertain a more foolish hope than to expect to be distinguished by a constant course of happiness from that cloud of sufferers which surrounds us. We complain of our own hard lot, we repine at this or that inconvenience, whilst there are thousands, whose state is so far worse than ours, that they would think themselves happy if they might exchange their condition for that which we think so insupportable. We imagine, it may be, that we have many causes of discontent: we should look abroad a little, and see how it fares with the rest of mankind; and when we have done this

this, if we return home again and enter into ourselves, and consider our condition, we shall find that perhaps it is not so bad as it might have been, and that there is nothing uncommon in it.

This is an argument which Heathen * authors have very frequently used, and which they seem to have accounted one of the best. But it may be thought liable to a few objections.

First, it may be said that evils are not the less felt by us because we know that others also suffer them; and that the consideration of the calamities abounding in all times and places,

* It perpetually occurs in their consolatory writings. In poetical language it runs thus :

—Abcant questus,

Discede timor, Vita est avidus,

Quisquis non vult, mundo secum

Pereunte, mori,

Seneca, Thyest. 881.

Dulce mœrenti populus dolentium,

Dulce lamentis resonare gentes.

Lenius luctus lacrymaeque mordent,

Turba quas fletu simili frequentat.—

Ferre quam sortem patiuntur omnes,

Nemo recusat. &c.

Troad. 1009.

Levat enim dolorem communis quasi legis et humane conditionis recordatio. *Cicero.*

of

of which every one must expect a share, is rather a motive to us to be willing to leave the world, than to be contented in it.

The objection is not material. To say that our evils are not alleviated from the consideration that they are common to mankind, is to cavil, and to contradict matter of fact, and the testimony of multitudes. And to the observation that reflections upon the troubles of life will rather incline us to dislike the world than to be contented in it, to that it may be replied; A moderate contempt of the world and contentment are not far asunder: repining and discontent arise from a violent affection for things here below; and a coldness towards them enables us to bear the diminution, the absence, or the loss of them the more calmly.

There remains another and a stronger objection, namely, that it is a * spiteful and mali-

* Semper, ah semper dolor est MALIGNUS;

Gaudet in multos sua fata mitti,

Seque non solum placuisse potest.

Seneca, Troad. 1013.

Non, mehercule, tam male de moribus tuis sentio, ut putem posse te levius pati casum tuum, si tibi ingentem numerum lugentium produxero. Malevoli solatii genus est; turba miserorum. Quosdam tamen referam—ut scias fuisse multos, qui lenierunt aspera, ferendo placide. *Consol. ad Marciam.* 12.

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cious comfort which is drawn from the sufferings of others, and a proof that we take pleasure in them, and would see none happier than ourselves.

The proper answer to it seems to be this: Evils of any sort are then most irksome to us when they come unexpected, and surprise us unprepared to bear them. We then think our condition particularly hard, and ourselves singled out, as it were, by Providence to suffer more than others; and we persuade ourselves that any one would be as uneasy as we are. But observations upon the course of things will teach us to arm ourselves against disappointments, and not expect a settled prosperity; they will inform us of greater afflictions than in all probability we have known, and of many persons who have shewed an evenness of temper, and a calmness of mind, under circumstances as undesirable as ours, and who have made them light by bearing them decently. Such reflections surely may be made without any malignity, any satisfaction arising directly from the misfortunes or miseries of others. When we read or hear of great and good persons, adorned with useful and amiable accomplishments, overlooked and neglected by the world, exposed to poverty,

poverty, losses, slights, censures, or other inconveniences, proceeding with patient serenity and mild composure, neither envying the fortunate, nor fawning upon the worthless, nor bemoaning themselves, nor repining, nor complaining; in contemplating these characters, we find instruction, and relief, and pleasure too, a pleasure accompanied with no malevolence, but with the sincerest esteem for such persons. There is indeed such greatness and dignity in suffering Virtue, that it can hardly excite our pity, which seems to give place to admiration and applause. Our Saviour, speaking of good men tried with adversity, and maintaining their patience and integrity, represents them rather as objects of reverence than of compassion, annexes blessedness to their condition, and pronounces them happy upon the whole.

III. Another motive to allay our discontent may be suggested to us from considering the bad disposition of so many persons, who having those things of which we are deprived, yet are by no means contented. They want something which they have not, or they are afraid of losing that which they have. We think them no better than fools. But have we not reason to fear that if we were in their situation, we should

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should be just such fools as they? A person who is resigned and contented in an inconvenient state, may reasonably enough presume that a better state would not spoil him; but the same discontent which makes his present condition so irksome to him, would probably follow and accompany him even in the midst of plenty and prosperity.

IV. Another cause for contentment may be drawn from such a consideration of divine Providence, as the light of reason will suggest. God is our common Father, the best and greatest of beings: he is not an unconcerned spectator of causes and effects; he is not ignorant of our condition; he is not envious and cruel; he takes no pleasure in our disappointments and sorrows; he places us in a state which he knows to be convenient for us, though we perhaps cannot at present discern it to be so. Let us therefore humbly, and, if we can, cheerfully commit ourselves to his care, and be contented to act the part allotted to us. To will what God wills, to like what he orders, is a duty which was discerned by several persons even in the Pagan world, and recommended by some of them in an excellent manner.

V. Another reason for contentment is taken from a consideration of the advantages and the good things which fall to our share. Every dissatisfied person is ungrateful. What he has not he knows too well, and calls to mind too often; and of what he has he seems to be quite ignorant. Several blessings which deserve daily returns of thanksgiving are bestowed upon him, blessings which relate to his mind, or body, or possessions, or friends, or family.

VI. It should also be considered that there are many advantages which often arise out of those very inconveniences which we dislike, and that there are many evils and bad consequences which frequently attend a more flourishing condition.

We may instance in poverty, that is in a middle state between indigence and wealth. A person in that state hath perhaps few friends, but they are usually sincere; he hath few enemies, and those usually inconsiderable. Envy and Calumny commonly spare him and overlook him, as one beneath their notice: his wants call him to labour, to industry, to temperance, and these are the best means of preserving the health of his body and of his mind. Thus might we survey and examine many

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the hardships and misfortunes of which men complain, and point out something profitable which often accompanies them, and lessens their weight.

But wealth and power and prosperity, though harmless in themselves, are to many persons very pernicious; to a weak mind and a bad temper they prove fatal blessings and dangerous companions. They come like proud and magnificent guests, and bring with them a long train of troublesome attendants, of follies, and cares, and disorders; they teach men to forget their great concern, to contract an immoderate fondness for the amusements and allurements of the world; and by raising their passions and weakening their reason, they make them unable to bear even common and trifling disappointments.

VII. I have shewed that we ought to accept of the state in which Providence hath thought fit to place us: and the reasons hitherto used have been those which our own abilities enable us to discover. But there are yet stronger motives to contentment, which revelation more particularly suggests to us. Contentment is best learned in the school of Christ: there St. Paul learned it; I have learned, says

he, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased, and how to abound : every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth me.

Another reason then for contentment may be drawn from considering God's love and care for us, as set forth in the Gospel. He is there represented as the Father of mercies, and the God of all consolation ; we are there taught that he loved us before we loved him, and so loved the world, that he gave his only Son to mankind, and with and by him remission of sins and assurance of happiness ; that he who conferred upon us so inestimable a benefit, will certainly refuse us nothing expedient for us ; that he who gave us his Son, will freely give us all things ; that he is our Father, who loves us better than any parent ever loved any child ; that we may cast our cares upon him, because he careth for us, and will never forsake those who serve him ; that when evil of any kind befalls us, God permits and designs it for our profit, either to wean us from this world, or to try our love to him, and to exercise our virtue,

tue, or to correct us for some failings, or because too much prosperity might be dangerous and fatal to us ; that all things shall work together for our good, and that we shall receive from him an hundred fold now, in this present time, that is, many solid advantages, which are beyond comparison more valuable than those upon which the world sets so great an esteem.

VIII. Another motive to contentment ariseth from reflections upon our own defects and unworthiness. If upon a review of our lives, our conscience bears witness against us that we have been guilty of many transgressions, and this is the case of many a discontented person, all dissatisfaction under our present condition must be most unreasonable and ungrateful. How can we think it hard that God should not grant us all our desires, when we have not given him what he requires from us ? Instead of yielding to sullen discontent, we should be very thankful that we have opportunities in our hand of reconciling ourselves to him by amendment. Why should a living man complain ? Life, considered only in itself, is perhaps of no high value ; but to one who hath mispent his past days, and been negligent in

his duty, every hour of it is an inestimable treasure, because rightly employed it may conduce to his eternal welfare. Whosoever hath still his peace to make with God, and time still allowed him to do it, should esteem himself most happy, and think of the case of those sinners whose sun is set, from whose eyes the things belonging to their peace are now hid, and who are gone to receive the recompense of their evil deeds. * How gladly would they return, and take up with a life which he thinks destitute of all comfort!

IX. The last motive to contentment which I shall mention, arises from the consideration of the reward which is set before us.

It is a most certain and evident truth, that if any person firmly believed a future state of happiness, and could entertain an humble and modest hope that he should have some share in it, he would more easily rest satisfied with his condition for the few days of his pilgrimage here below. The expectation of undisturbed peace and rest from all trouble, the hope of living for ever with God and with good beings, and of making a continual progress in wisdom

* *Quam vellent æthere in alto
Nunc et pauperiem, et duros tolerare labores!*

and

and knowledge, in virtue and in every amiable disposition, would compose the mind, and raise it above care and disquiet. Temporal inconveniences would then seem little and inconsiderable, and the common objects of men's hopes and fears, of their desires and uneasiness, would appear as a shadow which in a moment is and is not. Whilst the inhabitants of this world are busied in various employments with eager diligence and assiduity, as if they had no views reaching beyond this life, or as if they were to dwell here for ever, whilst some of them heap up riches, others seek applause and respect, others labour to advance themselves, others are wholly taken up with pleasures and amusements, others grieve because they are disappointed, and their labours are unrewarded, and the world frowns upon them, the swift and silent flight of days carries them all to the hour when these things cease, or when they have no further use. The children of God, like the children of this world, have their appointed time to employ ; like them they pass their days in a place where there is no settled habitation, no certain possession ; like them they meet with vicissitudes of ease and pain, of

prosperity and adversity ; like them they are carried away by the revolutions of days and years to their last end : but to Christians this last end is the dawning to an everlasting day, the entrance into peace and happiness, and the beginning of a life which alone* deserves the name of life.

These are motives which reason and revelation offer, to make us contented in our several states. If they have no good effect, the fault is rather in us than in them ; and indeed it is easier to convince the understanding, than to reform the heart and compose the passions. The true method therefore to acquire contentment is to be good, or, if we have offended, to repent and amend : else we may seek it late and early, but we shall not find it. It doth not use to make its abode in wicked minds. It is probable that such persons will not possess it even when they are in a state of prosperity, because guilt is commonly an uneasy thing ; but it is most certain that they will not enjoy it, when evil of any sort overtakes them ; for that is the time when their conscience will give them the most disturbance.

* —το ζην μὴν ὅτι κατθανεῖν,
 Το κατθανεῖν δι' ζην.

Euripides.

As a careful observance of our duty in general is the best method of acquiring contentment, so there are particular acts of religion which have a more immediate connection with it : such is supplication to God, that he would raise our minds above the world, and scatter those clouds of Sadness that overshadow them, and lift up the light of his countenance upon us, and strengthen us against all events, to which humble and earnest addresses favourable promises of support are made in the Scriptures ; such is humility, and a sense of our defects ; and such is gratitude for benefits received.

To these we should by all means add industry in our affairs and callings. If you observe the dissatisfied part of mankind, you shall find no small number of them to be indolent and unoccupied. Idleness breeds in them discontent ; and discontent increases their aversion from business ; and then every thing displeases them. But industry is innocent, pleasant, and profitable ; drives out despondence and melancholy by diverting the thoughts, and fixing them on other objects, and by ever presenting to the mind something new, and something useful.

To industry should also be joined a sober and sparing use of those things which are not

absolutely requisite to our being, or to our well-being ; a decent moderation in food, in raiment, in furniture, in equipage, in diversions and amusements. For here again, if you consider the discontented tribe, you shall find that one great cause of their uneasiness arises from their coveting, not the necessaries, no, nor yet the conveniences, but the superfluities of life ; it arises from those artificial and imaginary wants, which are not of God's producing, which the World, the Flesh, and the Devil, have contrived together to create, which human nature knows not, and which Reason and Scripture allow not. All such extravagant cravings bring forth as many moral evils and pernicious effects. Of this wicked and wide-spread disease the remedy is always at hand, and that remedy is Temperance.

And here the present season, and the exhortations of the Church admonish me to recommend to you temperance, and abstinence, abstinence exercised with discretion ; and not to dismiss you without some hints upon this subject.

There is, as we may not improperly call it, a perpetual fast, to which we are obliged, as
rational

rational creatures, and as Christians ; namely, a fast from all intemperate affections, turbulent passions, and irregular practices. But there is also an abstinence at particular times from the lawful pleasures of life ; and the fitness of such a conduct may easily be proved upon the principles of human reason and common sense. I explain myself by a few instances : your own thoughts may suggest more.

A person in health and in good circumstances hath food of various kinds at command. But such is the instability of human affairs, that he may be reduced to a morsel of bread. It is expedient therefore for him, at certain times, to take up with such spare and plain diet, as sufficeth to remove pain and to satisfy the cravings of the body. He will be better able to shift for himself upon any turn of fortune. I need not add that such abstinence will conduce to preserve his health. No one, I presume, will deny it.

Such a person, it may be, hath various diversions and entertainments at command, and may repair to them as often as he thinks fit. But many accidents may deprive him at a stroke of all these beloved amusements, which are the epidemical disease and infatuation of the

the present age. Let him learn then how to live without them, by shunning them more frequently, whilst they are in his reach.

Such a person may usually have a variety of company abroad and at home. But various events may reduce him to solitude. Let him then learn before-hand to bear solitude at certain times, to converse with useful books, with his God, and with his own soul, and think himself in good company.

Whosoever practises such abstinence upon the principles above mentioned, may be said to keep a moral and philosophical fast; but if what he thus saves in his expences, he gives to the needy and deserving, then, and not till then, he converts his rational into a truly religious and Christian fast.

S E R M O N III.

MATT. V. 44.

But I say unto you, love your enemies.

CONCERNING the precept of forgiving and loving our enemies, we may observe that there have been persons in all times who have entertained wrong notions of it. Some by their rigid interpretations have made it require more than was intended by our Saviour, more than is practicable in the nature of things; others have accommodated it to the weakness and wickedness of men in such a manner as to explain the greater part of it quite away. We may also observe, it is indeed an observation which will force itself upon us, that few of our Lord's precepts have been less obeyed than this, and that most men find it a duty not at all suitable to their inclinations; for which reluctance they

they have none to blame besides themselves, and the bad habits they have contracted.

Since then this duty hath been frequently misrepresented, and seldom accurately obeyed, if we would treat of it fully and distinctly ;

First, we ought to rescue it from the attempts of those who add to it, and of those who detract from it.

Secondly, we should recommend the practice of it, by shewing that nothing is more reasonable, and that the motives and obligations to such a behaviour are plain and strong and numerous.

I shall at present confine myself to the first thing proposed, reserving the latter for another opportunity, and endeavour to shew ;

I. What the precept of loving our enemies may be justly supposed not to require.

II. In what manner this duty ought to be performed.

I. Though we have received a general command to pray for our enemies, to bless them, to love them, and to assist and relieve them, yet it follows not thence,

First, that Christian nations may not wage war with their enemies, from whom they have received considerable injuries.

Secondly,

Secondly, that men may not in the defence of their own lives take away the lives of those who unjustly assault them :

Thirdly, that magistrates ought not to punish malefactors suitably to their offences :

Fourthly, that Christians may not secure or recover their right and property, by the methods of justice and equity, which the Government appoints.

The lawfulness of these things hath been denied by some, in confuting whom it is not needful to spend many words. It sufficeth to observe that the law of nature permits men to act thus, that the Gospel forbids it not, that the well-being and the very being of society absolutely requires it; that if we must love our enemies, we must love ourselves and families at least as much, and our country far more; that therefore we ought to prefer the interest of justice, righteousness and equity, to the views and attempts of unreasonable and wicked men; lastly, that true love to friends or to foes cannot be shewed in suffering them to break with impunity the laws of God and men, but rather in using seyerer methods with them when the public good demands it, and gentler courses are ineffectual. Lenity in such cases would be great unkindness

unkindness even to the offending persons, who would be permitted by a cruel indulgence to add sin to sin, and to increase their guilt and their future punishment.

Our Saviour says, Swear not at all—Resist not evil—If a man smite thee on the one cheek, turn to him the other; if he take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also—give to him that asketh—lend to him that would borrow—when thou makest a feast, call the poor—judge not—condemn not—labour not for the meat that perisheth.—These and other precepts of the like kind, delivered in a concise and sententious way, are not to be interpreted literally and with extreme rigour. The Gospel supposes us to be rational creatures, and to have some knowledge of natural religion. It contains many precepts and counsels, commands and prohibitions, expressed in general unrestrained terms, which must admit various exceptions and limitations, according to different circumstances. The nature of things, and common sense, must direct us in the application of general laws to particular occasions. Cases of difficulty may arise, when a person may be in doubt how he ought to act, and if he thinks that he is not able to determine for himself, he may

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may consult books of established reputation, or ask advice of those of whose wisdom and probity he has a good opinion. But such intricate cases are not frequent ; and an upright mind, joined to moderate abilities, will seldom fail of passing a right judgment in matters of morality. Men sometimes transgress the laws of Christianity through ignorance and mistake ; but much oftener, and commonly, because they will not act suitably to their knowledge, because they take pains to deceive themselves and to stifle the reproofs of their conscience. So again, men sometimes interpret precepts of the Gospel too severely, and prefer the letter and the sound of the words to the true sense and intent of them, through fanaticism and superstition, and sometimes through mere weakness and stupidity ; but, in all probability, often through hypocrisy, or conceitedness, or a stubborn spirit of contradiction, and a false shame of owning their error, or of disobliging a sect to which they have joined themselves.

II. I proceed to shew, secondly, what the precept of loving our enemies requires from us.

By our enemies, whom we are commanded to love, are to be understood those who without any considerable provocation are our enemies ;

mies ; for to shew love to enemies is certainly the highest degree of social virtue, and supposes that we endeavour to observe all other duties towards mankind, and consequently that we have not injured those who hate us. It is a vain thing to exhort those persons to love their enemies, who by pride and moroseness, by lying and slandering, by ingratitude, by overreaching, by any scandalous and provoking behaviour make to themselves adversaries : they are not prepared to receive, or even to understand this precept ; there are many previous duties which they must learn to perform. The Gospel requires of us, first that we should do to others as we expect that they should do to us, and exercise all acts of humility, equity, and charity towards all men ; and then, as the completion of all, that we should love even those perverse and unreasonable persons whose good will we cannot obtain by the most obliging and inoffensive behaviour, whose hatred and malice is altogether inexcusable.

The love which we are commanded to have for God, and for our neighbour, is not a blind passion, but an affection first raised and then guided by reason, and distinguished in its degrees according to its object. We must love
God,

God, and our relations, and our friends and benefactors, and our fellow-citizens, and strangers, and our enemies. Our love towards these several objects will of course be different, and ought in reason so to be ; and the lowest degree of it is usually as much as is due to our enemies.

But because in this case men may easily impose upon themselves, and under pretence of reserving for their adversaries the lowest degree of their love, may afford them no small degree of hatred, they should carefully and particularly consider in what sentiments and in what behaviour love towards enemies is manifested.

We must love our enemies ; that is, we must have a favourable disposition of mind towards them, which will always incline us to be just and charitable in our dealings with them. This temper is to operate in the following manner.

Our anger must be short in its continuance, and harmless in its effects. Be ye angry and sin not ; let not the sun go down upon your wrath. Ill usage which we have not deserved is very provoking, and indignation will naturally and unavoidably arise upon such occasions. But when our anger is thus excited, we must immediately call our reason to our assistance,

whose office is to bring us back by degrees to our usual evenness of temper. We must not indulge a secret displeasure by meditating continually upon the injuries which we have suffered, lest it should take full possession of us, and be turned into a confirmed hatred and malice. We must not act according to the first suggestions and impulses of passion, which will vent itself, if we be not cautious, in contumelious language. We must abstain from this, what provocation soever we have received : Bless those who curse and revile and persecute you ; bless and curse not ; render not railing for railing, but contrariwise blessing. Thus civility and decency in our discourse is required from us even to our rudest persecutors.

We must not revenge ourselves of our enemies. Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath ; for it is written, Vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord. We, who are offended, are of all persons the most improper judges of the punishment due to the offender. There are few who set not a value upon themselves, and upon every thing that belongs to them, which an impartial examiner would think excessive. We should therefore reject, as a dangerous temptation, any opportunity

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portunity of punishing our enemies, or redressing ourselves, by our own power and authority, and leave it to God, who is the God of Vengeance, or to the Magistrate, who is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doth evil. And it were to be wished that Christians would leave their cause oftener in the hand of God, and seldomer in the hand of the Magistrate, and not seek the revenge which they frequently pursue upon slight provocations. Though they are allowed to defend and right themselves by those methods which the laws of their country have allowed, they are obliged as Christians to use this power discreetly and moderately, not to give way to fury and malice, nor break the sacred law of lenity and mercy, the great and the peculiar commandment of their Lord: For, as our Saviour says upon another occasion, What is a man profited, if he get the better of his adversary, and lose his good temper, his inclinations to charity and compassion, the peace of his mind, and the favour of his God? His gain is his loss, and his victory hath undone him. Every one, who pretends even to the name of a Christian, ought to be contented if he can obtain his own; and if that be impossible, as often it is, he should

never desire to vex and oppress those who have wronged him, when he can propose no advantage by it, except the inhuman pleasure of making them miserable.

We must forgive our enemies. Our Lord hath commanded us to declare to God that we forgive those who trespass against us. To forgive them implies somewhat more than to abstain from revenge : it is, to wish them no evil, but whatsoever may conduce to their true happiness, and to behave ourselves towards them on all occasions, where Christian charity and common humanity are required, as though they never had offended us.

We must pray for our enemies. Pray for those who despitefully use you and persecute you. To shew the sincerity of our charity, we are obliged to express it, where all dissimulation must be of dreadful consequence, in our prayers to God for their amendment and welfare.

We must do good offices to our enemies, when it lies in our power, and is consistent with our duty to society. Do good to them that hate you, that ye may be the children of your Father in heaven : for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sendeth rain on the just and

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and the unjust. If thine enemy hunger, feed him ; if he thirst, give him drink.

Such is the nature and the extent of this duty, according to the rules of the Gospel.

I shall now conclude with an examination of two or three objections which may be made to the foregoing doctrine.

1. It may be said ; We are masters of our actions, but not of our affections. It is in our power to behave ourselves kindly and charitably to our enemies, but it is often impossible to love them. An object of love must have something that we like, that we approve, that we would imitate and possess. If we have an enemy, an implacable enemy, an enemy in whom upon the most careful survey we cannot find one good quality, we shall never be able to incline our hearts to love him.

To this it may be replied ; If we think our enemy void of all good qualities, it is much to be feared that we are misled by passion and prejudice, and form a wrong judgment of him. Our enemy in all probability is not singularly bad ; he hath his faults, and he hath some commendable dispositions.

But suppose that he is very wicked. There is even in the worst person a power of amend-

ing, a capacity of changing for the better. This should be sufficient to secure him from our hatred, and to make him the object of our charity, of our prayers, and good wishes.

Besides; the love which is required from us to our enemies is not a fond affection for them, it is not a respect and esteem for them, unless upon other accounts they should deserve it; but it is a compassionate and charitable disposition towards them. Such a disposition we may entertain towards all offenders, nor doth it exclude a rational self-regard, or an abhorrence of iniquity, or a prudent zeal for virtue and for religion.

2. It may be objected, that to relieve the wants of our enemy can hardly ever be our duty. It is indeed our duty to assist the needy as far as we are able; but the poor we have always with us, and so numerous are they, that we cannot do good offices to many of them; though we may have a willing mind, yet our circumstances may be such, that our assistance must be extended only to a few. Prudence therefore should direct us in choosing the objects of our charity; and if we can find several who in our judgment deserve relief better than our enemy, we may prefer them to him,

Let

Let us consider this objection a little.

Our enemy is unworthy to be the object of our liberality, because he is our enemy. This is a partial way of judging; as if a man's personal enmity to us were a complication of all vices. Though he hath failed in his duty to us, he may have some good qualities, his family may have more; and we may refuse him assistance, whilst we afford it to others who deserve it less than he, if we form a judgment of him from his behaviour towards us.

Our enemy stands in need of our good offices. Then surely he is so unhappy that he may justly claim compassion; he is reduced to the hard necessity of receiving kindness from an injured person. We have then an opportunity of chastising him in a decent manner, by affording him an assistance which must raise in him some remorse and confusion.

Our enemy stands in need of our help. Then may we possibly make him a friend, at least no longer an enemy; for there are few who can brutally persist in returning evil for good.

The Gospel gives us a general direction, as we have opportunity, to do good to all, even to our enemies. How we should act in particular cases, must be left to our own discretion,

If therefore it happens that our enemy is reduced to great want, and that we can be serviceable to him, we must take in all circumstances, and consider whether it becomes us to assist him, and how far. In this inquiry we must always remember that our inclinations and prejudices are against him, and that therefore the safest and the justest way of acting, will be to shew him rather more favour than we think him to deserve.

Of all the particular duties included in the love of our enemy, this seems the easiest to be performed. * When a man is in distress, they whom he hath offended, if they have any humanity, will find their anger and their resentment to die away. His misfortunes, his incapacity of doing them any harm, the meanness of insulting the miserable, the thought that men are all liable to the same common calamities, and that what † happens to one may happen to every one, the pleasure of forcing an adversary to own that he was in fault, and to esteem and honour us ; these and many other things plead so strongly in his behalf, that to

* Quos injuriæ invisos faciunt, gratiosos miseriæ reddunt.
VAL. MAXIMUS, V. iii. 3.

† Cuivis potest accidere, quod cuiquam potest,

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use him well can scarcely be called an act of self-denial, and a victory over the passions.

3. It hath been maintained by some persons that it is lawful in some cases to pray to God against our enemies. The sum of what they have said amounts to this, that the duty of doing good to our enemies relates to our personal enemies with whom we are joined in society ; but that when it is not a private disagreement, but a quarrel of a public nature between different nations upon a civil or religious account, or when our foes are disturbers of the common peace, foes to God, to virtue, to religion, not capable of being reclaimed by gentle methods, or in all appearance incorrigible, that in those cases we may pray to God to protect us, and to punish or destroy them ; and this upon two accounts ; first, because it is lawful to defend ourselves against them ; and secondly, because several passages of Scripture countenance and warrant such prayers.

Now since we are most prone to err on the uncharitable side, and since it agrees better with the spirit of Christianity to pray for our enemies than to pray against them, to bless than to curse, I shall endeavour to shew that the forementioned doctrine is not to be admitted,

at

at least not without many restrictions and limitations.

First, then, the lawfulness of praying against our enemies is plainly founded upon this supposition, that success, victory, peace, and temporal prosperity are always desirable and that calamities, persecutions, oppression and ill-usage are always hurtful. But the Gospel informs us that the only things which are absolutely and invariably profitable for us, are those which conduce to our eternal welfare; that the only things unchangeably pernicious, are those which lead us to future destruction; that present prosperity or adversity, though the one be natural good, and the other natural evil, considered in itself and with relation to its immediate effects, yet upon the whole are good or evil to us, according to the use which we make of them; that temporal prosperity, if it makes us fond of unlawful pleasures, careless of our salvation, despisers of virtue, and forgetful of God, is the greatest curse which could fall upon us; that adversity, if it raises in us a religious sorrow for our sins, an indifference for the vanities of this world, and an earnest desire of life eternal, is no inconsiderable blessing; that we who are imperfect and ignorant

ignorant creatures, cannot judge whether of the two states will suit us best ; that God certainly knows how we shall behave ourselves in either, and that he will place us in the condition which is most expedient for us, if we sincerely desire that not our will but his be done. This is the morality of the New Testament, and it is agreeable to the dictates of unprejudiced reason. Hence it follows that we ought not to ask, or to expect of God any thing relating to the present life, without this restriction, mentioned or understood, if it be expedient for us. Concerning our enemies public or private, we should pray that they may repent and return to a better mind, and that God would protect and defend us against them in such a way and as far as to his infinite wisdom shall seem most expedient. To desire God to punish and destroy them, is to constitute ourselves judges of the station and circumstances in which we and they ought to be placed, that is, to assume a sagacity and a wisdom which belong not to human nature.

Nor is it a just conclusion that we may pray against our enemies, because we may fight against them. We have a natural right to defend ourselves against those who unjustly assault

us, and the Christian system hath not taken away this right, though in some cases it may limit and restrain it ; but we have received a command to pray for our enemies, without any exceptions.

We find indeed in the Scriptures instances of imprecations and curses uttered against enemies ; but a few observations will shew that we cannot thence prove the lawfulness of praying against any man.

First, The holy men recorded in Scripture were men *. Before we presume to imitate them, we should examine their behaviour by the rules contained in the New Testament. If it be not conformable to those rules, it will afford us neither direction nor excuse. The Scriptures set before us one, and only one example, which is in all things to be imitated, as far as human infirmity permits, the example of Christ, who always returned good for evil, and who prayed for his enemies.

* Grotius says :

Virorum laudatorum facta non laudanda quoties adferuntur in sacris literis, solet aliquid addi, unde intelligamus id non probari. Ad Reg. III. xii. 19.

This is true often, but not always. Whosoever shall try to defend all the actions of good men recorded in the Old Testament, which are neither commended nor censured there, will find that he hath undertaken too hard a task.

Secondly,

Secondly, We ought to regard the precepts of the Gospel more than the practice of those who lived before Christ.

Thirdly, They who are acquainted with the languages in which the Scriptures are written, know that many expressions, which seem to be curses and wishes of evil, may be no more than declarations of future events, and predictions rather than imprecations.

Lastly, If prophets sometimes received orders to pronounce * curses against the enemies of God and of God's people, it follows not that they, who have no such extraordinary commission to plead, may do the same.

If therefore we are injured, we should pray to God that he would enable us to follow the example of our Saviour, and to bear with patience and true fortitude the insults which we receive from perverse and unreasonable men, that he would pardon those who not giving them-

* The bitterest imprecations in the Scriptures are contained in the hundred and ninth Psalm, and they have been commonly supposed to be the words of David; but it seems more probable that they are not the curses which David pronounced against his enemies, but the curses which his enemies pronounced against him, and which he repeats in their own words; and then says, in the twenty-seventh verse, *Though they curse, yet blest thou, &c.* Be that as it will, they are no patterns for Christians to imitate.

selves

selves leave to know and to consider what they do, are enemies to us and to themselves ; and since forgiveness depends upon repentance, that he would grant them a true and timely sense of their transgressions ; that he would deliver us from their oppressive malice, if it be a proper request ; if not, that the evils which we now suffer may turn to our advantage in a future state.

Such will be the sentiments and the wishes of a mind which hath learned obedience to the Gospel, and the government of itself ; and whatsoever is more than these, cometh of evil.

S E R M O N IV.

R O M. xii. 20.

If thine enemy hunger, feed him ; if he thirst, give him drink ; for in so doing, thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head.

IN these words a duty is proposed to do good to our enemies ; If thine enemy hunger, feed him ; if he thirst, give him drink : an inducement also is proposed to act thus, or else a declaration of the consequence of such behaviour ; For in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head.

The duty of loving our enemies I have stated and explained in a former discourse. At present therefore I design to shew the reasonableness of this duty, and to set before you several motives to the observance of it, and in particular to consider that seeming motive which is contained in these words ; for in so doing, thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head.

1. Com-

1. Compassion is so opposite to hatred, and so nearly allied to love, that if we can pity our enemies, a brotherly affection towards them will easily be added. Let us see then whether their case when duly considered be adapted to move compassion. Every person who hates and injures others is as great a foe to himself as he is to them. He suffers the just and heavy punishment which an envious, malicious, and implacable mind inflicts upon itself. Anger, hatred, and desires of revenge prey upon the heart which harbours them, and whether they be satisfied, or disappointed in their aim, will allow it no rest. These are the hard masters to whom our enemies are probably in subjection, and to these are perhaps added fear and remorse, which have their intervals of reigning. We may therefore justly suppose that if the hearts of our enemies lay open to our view, we should behold a melancholy and disagreeable scene, a wild mixture of confusion and disquiet, of impatience, and anxiety, and sorrow, and shame. Such a sight would command our compassion, and though we were full of resentment against them, we should be forced to acknowledge that if they were wicked, they were also miserable.

But

S E R M O N IV. 65

But let us suppose that our enemies are of so bad a disposition, and so hardened in the ways of vice, that they can contrive and execute mischief without any reproach of conscience, without the loss of inward peace and self-approbation, that they are also successful in all their perverse undertakings; we must not forget to observe, that by injuring us they offend God, and consequently are extremely unhappy. God, who so strictly forbids iniquity, will never pardon them these trespasses against us, unless they repent of them and correct their behaviour.

Thus if we consider our adversaries as the sport and the prey of turbulent passions, or as the objects of divine displeasure, as persons suffering in this world the evils which malice ordinarily produces, or in danger of undergoing in the next world the punishment which God denounces against such offenders; humanity, if we are not strangers to it, will overcome our resentment, and the religion which we profess will tell us that we should contribute what we can towards their reformation, upon which their salvation depends, and the most probable method to effect it is to use them kindly, to shew them that we have their welfare at

heart, and thus to convince them that we deserve their esteem.

2. If we have a tolerable command of our passions, we bear with patience the mischief which is done to us accidentally by persons who designed us no harm, or who have not sense to know what they do. We should set our enemies in the same light, and view them as ignorant and mistaken men. This indeed is the case, and a true representation of their condition. We are quite unknown to them : it is not us whom they hate, but a person that their own imagination hath conceived, and that is no where to be found. If they were acquainted with us, with our real character, they would be sorry for what they have done. It is true indeed that they should have taken more care in forming their judgments : and that since their mistakes might have been avoided by a right use of reason, their ignorance renders them not innocent and unblameable ; but still it behoves us to make allowances for their error, and to forgive them, because they know not what they do. There is nothing more common than to judge wrong.

3. It is our duty to be as like to God as we can ; it is also our perfection and our happiness.

Wo

We are exhorted to love our enemies from this consideration, that we may be the children of our Father in heaven, who maketh the sun to rise and the rain to descend on the evil and on the good, who would have all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth, who is kind to the unthankful, who commendeth his love to us, in that whilst we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

The Scripture sets before us for our imitation the example of our Saviour, who was exposed to the highest injuries and provocations, and returned only acts of kindness and mercy. And this he did for our sakes, for our advantage; but the good which we do to others is as much our profit as theirs, and perhaps more.

4. The reasonableness of a charitable disposition towards our enemies appears from the consideration that the hatred and malice of mortal creatures is often confined to narrow bounds, and cannot execute the mischief which it intends.

The wrongs which we think grievous to be endured, and which we are unwilling to forgive, are frequently inconsiderable. Our enemies have perhaps treated us with haughtiness and contempt, have affronted us with reviling language,

language, have told untruths of us, and misrepresented us, have done things in some degree prejudicial to our interests. These are the insults which we so highly resent, and which we repay with settled aversion, instead of despising them as trifles beneath our notice.

But let us suppose the injuries to which we are exposed to be of a more grievous nature, and attended with many inconveniences; we have, if we are Christians indeed, a refuge to which we can fly, and greater is He who is for us than he who is against us. What our Saviour says upon another occasion, may be applied here: Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all other things shall be added unto you, and your enemies shall not be able to take them from you, and to make you miserable. By serving God we may secure to ourselves a Friend whom they cannot seduce from us, a reputation which they cannot destroy, a treasure which they cannot steal, a reward which they cannot lessen, or rather, which, against their designs and inclinations, they will increase. They cannot hurt us much, and they cannot hurt us long. We shall not spend many days with them: we are going to a place where their ill offices cannot

S E R M O N IV. 69

cannot follow us, nor they themselves, unless they amend their ways, where we shall either never see them, or see them adorned with contrary dispositions. Envy, and calumny, and hatred, and revenge enter not there, to disturb the peace of its inhabitants.

5. From the consideration of divine Providence, as directing all events, or presiding over them, we find another motive to forgive our enemies. To be filled with envy, rage, malice, and resentment against them, to be very angry and very uneasy when we cannot revenge ourselves, is in effect to be angry with God, who permits them to insult and oppress us. The prosperity of the wicked hath often been matter of offence to those who, comparatively speaking, were righteous persons, and who sometimes indiscreetly levelled their complaints against God himself, as if he neglected the government of the world. But the clear revelation of the Gospel, by its great rewards and gracious promises, by the express doctrine of life eternal, and of divine assistance and consolation in time of need, removes every difficulty of this kind. We should remember that not only all shall be set right at the last, but that a wise and good Providence permits these

and other temporal inconveniences, perhaps for our improvement, perhaps for our correction, and that upon either account we ought to bear them decently.

6. This leads me to mention another motive of the same nature with the last, namely, that if we state the account fairly between ourselves and our enemies, we shall find that we receive, or may receive, more good than harm from their unkindness: and therefore we should be the more disposed to forgive them, and to consider them as persons highly necessary and useful to us. Whilst we dwell in this world there are many present advantages arising to us, if we know how to use them, from the perverseness of our enemies. When we are certain that there are persons who watch our behaviour, to take advantage of our negligence and inadvertence, of any faults and follies committed by us, and to censure and expose and hurt us if we give them an opportunity, this should make us, and this often will make us, diligent, industrious, obliging, careful to preserve our reputation, to contract profitable friendships, and to render the attempts of our opposers vain and ineffectual.

S E R M O N IV. 71

It would be a pleasant thing, as the Psalmist says, if men would dwell together, like brethren, in unity; and yet this happy state might have its inconveniences, and could not be durable; and a man who had no envious eye to watch him and overlook him, who would expect forbearance from all around him, might be tempted to grow remiss and slothful in his duty, and to depend too much upon the good-nature of others. The fear of ill usage, of loss and of disgrace, is often a prevailing incitement to well-doing, when more ingenuous motives would fail, or would have a weak effect, and happy hath it been for many persons that they have had enemies: it hath made them more learned, more judicious, and more virtuous than they would else have been.

7. But the plainest, perhaps, and the strongest of all the motives to the love of our enemies is contained in the declaration which Christ hath often made, that if we be cruel, malicious and inexorable to those who have offended us, we shall in vain apply to God for mercy and pardon, and that if we forgive those who trespass against us, he will also forgive us our trespasses. They who are not to be moved by arguments of a more refined nature, must feel the force

of this ; concerning which I shall only observe, that the promise must not be so understood as if the single duty of forgiving enemies, duly observed, would excuse all sorts of transgressions. Our Saviour supposes that we take care to preserve ourselves from vicious habits, and of other offences he declares that they shall be remitted upon this condition, joined to repentance and amendment. It is also reasonable to conclude from these terms of pardon, that he who can forgive considerable injuries, will in all probability, by the good temper of his own mind, and by God's blessing and assistance, perform every thing else that is necessary to his salvation.

8. I have not yet mentioned all the present advantages which we shall find from the observance of this duty.

By keeping our hearts free from anger and malice, and designs of revenge, we shut out so many implacable enemies to our repose. A desire and intent of repaying injuries with injuries is attended with a painful remembrance of the wrongs which we have received, and with a restless impatience till we have shewed our resentment by acts of enmity, and it is usually followed either by uneasiness, when we are disap-

disappointed in our designed revenge, and our power is not equal to our will; or else by sorrow, shame, and remorse, when we have punished our enemies according to the dictates of our unreasonable passions. These are troubles with which we shall not be acquainted, troubles which are often more grievous to be borne than all the mischief which our adversaries can accomplish.

By preserving this even temper, we preserve that dignity and superiority which distinguish those who act by the rules of reason from those who break them. As much as virtue is above vice, and wisdom above folly; so much are we, if we patiently bear injuries, superior to those who hate and persecute us.

By overlooking and forgiving offences, we take the most probable method to secure ourselves from them for the future. Revenge produces revenge; but kindness and long-suffering put a stop to the hatred of an enemy, unless he hath lost all sentiments of ingenuity, and is sunk below a beast. Though therefore by a Christian behaviour we may not be able to make a friend of a foe, a thing scarcely to be hoped, yet we may make him a cold and unactive foe. Pride itself, or shame, or fear
of

of censure, or some degree of remorse, may so far influence him, as to make his enmity indolent and remiss.

By treating our enemy with civility and humanity, we engage the favour of bystanders, of all impartial and unprejudiced persons, and may expect their approbation and assistance. Men can commend what is right, and condemn what is wrong, where their own passions and interests are not engaged; they then perceive the difference between revenge and forbearance, anger and patience, railing and courtesy, detraction and candour.

Another advantage which there is a possibility of obtaining by such a behaviour, is, that we may not only persuade our enemies to be quiet, and to do us no harm, but we may win their esteem and affection, and make them faithful and active friends to us.

The question hath been put, whether an enemy who acknowledgeth his fault, and seeks to be reconciled, may be sincere and constant in his professions; and consequently, whether he should be trusted, and received into favour and friendship. This question, I think, may be thus determined.

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The Scripture enjoins charity or brotherly love towards all ; private friendship it leaves to our own discretion ; it admonishes us to have no fellowship with wicked persons, and so far only interposeth. Though we be therefore obliged to forgive even an enemy who continues obstinate, much more one who repents and seeks to be reconciled, yet we are not required to receive him into familiarity and intimate conversation. In this we may act as we judge most expedient ; and whether we may safely trust such a person, or no, will best be judged by considering how he behaved himself whilst he was an enemy. If he acted in an open manner, and without disguise professed his dislike of us, he may, when he becomes sensible of his offence, repair it by good offices, and deserve our affection : but if his enmity was mixed with ingratitude, dissimulation, and perfidiousness, if he secretly injured us, and openly pretended to be a well-wisher, he ought indeed to be forgiven, but he ought also to be avoided. No professions of repentance and amendment should move us to contract any intimacy with him, or to place any confidence and reliance upon him. It hath been said by those who have considered mankind in the worst light,

light, that we can forgive those who injure us, but that we never forgive those whom we have injured. This saying, when applied to the persons above-mentioned, seems to be true. He who hath been a fawning, deceitful, and flandering enemy, can be a friend to no man, much less to him whom he hath offended. He knows that he cannot forgive injuries; judging therefore of others by his own dispositions, he expects not to be forgiven. He knows that he never grants a favour, unless upon the prospect of some advantage; and if he be kindly used by the person whom he hath wronged, he suspects some trick and design; he believes not that such kindness proceeds from virtuous and religious principles, but from fear, or self-interest, from motives like those which harbour in his own breast. If such a person seeks to be intimate with us, and professes his readiness to serve us, his intention is to serve himself at our expence; and whosoever tries the experiment of trusting him, will probably pay dear for his experience.

I shall now conclude with some observations on that seeming motive to the forgiveness of injuries, which is contained in the words of the text.

Dearly

Dearly beloved, says the Apostle, avenge not yourselves, for it is written, Vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him ; if he thirst, give him drink ; for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil ; but overcome evil with good.

Two interpretations are given to the words, Thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head. One is this ;

By repeated acts of charity thou shalt melt him down at length, even though he be most obstinate and hardened ; as the hardest metals are melted by putting live coals on the top of them.

This exposition looks plausible, and conveys a sense and a spirit in it so conformable to the sentiments of humanity and benevolence, that if it be not the meaning, one could almost wish that it were the meaning of the place. If therefore we cannot admit it as true, yet neither will we utterly condemn it, but leave it as a comment, which may be safely adopted, though it should be erroneous.

The other interpretation is thus : Feed thy enemy, and give him drink ; for in so doing thou

thou shalt bring down upon his head the just
 * vengeance of God.

This interpretation seems to be favoured by the words before it, in which Christians are exhorted to leave their cause to God, the God of vengeance, and by many places of Scripture, where fire and coals of fire denote God's wrath and punishments inflicted by him. Solomon, from whom St. Paul took these words, says in the Book of Proverbs; If thine enemy be hungry, give him bread to eat; and if he be thirsty, give him water to drink; for thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head, and the Lord shall reward thee. So in the Psalms; Let burning coals fall upon them. So in Esdras; Let not the sinner say that he hath not sinned; for God shall heap coals of fire upon his head, who saith before the Lord God and his glory, he hath not sinned. God, considered as the punisher of sinners, is said to be a consuming fire; when he manifested himself, his glory appeared as a devouring fire; when he is represented in the Psalms as taking vengeance, fire is said to have proceeded from him, and smoke, and burning coals, and lightnings; fire is an emblem of his

* Grotius and Whitby. See also Jerem. v. 14. and Revel. xi. 5. and Le Clerc, Bibl. A. and M. t. i. p. 373.

wrath

wrath and vindictive justice ; by fire he often punished the ungodly, as the inhabitants of Sodom, and the rebellious Jews ; by fire the world is to be consumed, and the future punishment of evil angels and evil men is represented under the words, everlasting fire.

Besides ; fire heaped upon the head, denotes vengeance descending from above, that is, divine vengeance.

Besides ; as the natural effect of heaping fire upon a man's head is destruction ; so in the figurative sense it should mean punishment.

Thus is this interpretation consistent with other passages in the Scripture, and with the context. There is indeed an objection to it, which is very obvious, and hath a very plausible appearance, namely, that thus St. Paul, whilst he seems to dissuade Christians from revenge, in reality incites them greatly to it, by setting before them a revenge which might satisfy the most malicious and inhuman enemy ; for it is in effect as if he had said, When you are ill used, be careful to avoid that foolish and often ineffectual revenge of returning evil for evil ; but do all acts of kindness to your enemies, by which means you will make them guilty of the most heinous crimes, and bring down

down the severest judgments of God upon the heads.

But there is no occasion to think that Paul meant any such thing, though we embrace the second interpretation, which may be justified thus :

The duty of a Christian to his enemy, as is laid down in the New Testament, is to forgive him, and to use him charitably.

As this is the only apparent method of reclaiming an enemy, a Christian who acts thus certainly uses his utmost endeavour to promote the temporal and the eternal welfare of his enemies.

But if wicked men oppress and persecute the good, and are not at all changed and softened by the mild and charitable behaviour of those whom they thus injure, what can we suppose that God the righteous governor and judge will do ? We must conclude, that in due time he will reward the patient behaviour of his suffering servants, and will punish the oppressive insolence of the wicked. So says St. Paul to the persecuted Thessalonians ; It is a righteous thing, an equitable, reasonable thing, with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you ; and to you who are troubled, rest with

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S E R M O N IV. 81

us. So again, in the Revelation of St. John, a dreadful description is made of the fall of Babylon, of a wicked city which should persecute the servants of Christ; after which, says the Apostle, I heard a great voice of much people, saying, Alleluia; salvation, and glory, and honour and power unto the Lord our God; for true and righteous are his judgments;—and he hath avenged the blood of his servants at her hand.

Since we must think that God will act thus, and since God hath declared that he will act thus, it is our duty to approve these proceedings, proceedings founded upon reason, upon the laws of order, upon the perfections of God.

Besides; it is to be observed that the divine vengeance denoted by the words, coals of fire, means in the Old Testament rather temporal judgments than punishments to be inflicted in the world to come; and as St. Paul hath thence borrowed the expression, there seems to be no necessity to extend the sense of it to any other chastisements than to those which the divine Providence inflicts or suffers to fall upon sinners in the present world. Now though we ought not to pray or to wish that temporal evils may befall unmerciful and tyrannical per-

sons, but rather leave it to God, yet when such evils overtake them, we may and we must think that the punishment is right, and that it is not only an act of divine justice, but of divine mercy and goodness also. If it puts it out of their power to injure others any longer, or if it deters others from following their example, it is a great and general benefit; and though it should cut them off in their iniquity, and take them out of the world, still it may be profitable even to them, either as it hinders them from adding to their sins, and consequently to their future misery, or as it is a part of their punishment, and gives room to hope that the more they suffer here, the less they may suffer hereafter.

Just and righteous are the ways and the judgments of God. The injurious and the injured are in his hands. He will reward suffering innocence, and he will correct insolent oppression without passion and prejudice, according to the dictates of perfect wisdom and perfect equity.

S E R M O N V.

R O M. xvi. 19.

I would have you wise to that which is good.

TH E R E is a wisdom, which is employed in pursuing power and wealth, and whatsoever power and wealth can procure, to gratify the inclinations of a mind set upon worldly objects.

This wisdom consists in a quickness to discover and a dexterity to apply the most probable means, whether they be lawful or unlawful, of acquiring and preserving these things. It consists in a knowledge of men, especially of their weak side, and in the art of managing their infirmities, passions, and vices, so as to make its advantage of them.

In the prosecution of its designs, it puts on all shapes, and employs all sorts of means, even the most dishonest and infamous; and if

these fail, or are not proper for its purpose, it hath recourse to actions which are commendable, and transforming itself into virtue, it can upon occasion practise justice, humanity, liberality, perform many good offices, and become useful to society. It consists therefore in a mixture of bad qualities, and of considerable accomplishments ; and he who would hope to be eminent in this wisdom, must have, besides a good understanding, industry, resolution, patience, courage, civility, experience, knowledge of things and of men, joined to a supple conscience, and to a mind free from religious scruples, and antiquated notions of honour and virtue.

It will not, I presume, be expected that I should use many words to prove that this is not the wisdom which the holy Scriptures so highly recommend, which they represent as an invaluable possession, which they declare to be a gift and a blessing descending from above, and which they advise us to request of Almighty God ; for neither can God be the author of so bad a gift, nor are they who possess it accustomed to ask him for it, or for any thing else, or to have him at all in their thoughts. The Scripture indeed makes mention, but not very honourable

ble mention, of this wisdom: it allows the professors of it to be wise men, wise after their own way, and in their generation, full of that wisdom of this world which is foolishness in the sight of God. The wisdom of this world it may justly be called upon two accounts, either because it steadily pursues the things of this world, and prefers them to all other views, or because it hath been so commonly esteemed by the world, and practised by those who have conducted the most important affairs of it.

There is, secondly, another sort of wisdom, which, like the first, hath in view the good things of this life; but pursues them only for lawful purposes, and by innocent and honest methods. It may be called, The Art of serving ourselves and our friends, without injuring others.

He who excels in this wisdom, understands the world, and the good and bad qualities of men, and his own strength and abilities, undertakes nothing for which he is unfit, makes himself master of the affairs in which he is concerned, observes those with whom he has dealings, knows how to manage their different tempers, and how far they may be trusted, gives no advantage to crafty and designing per-

sons by indiscretion, lets others know no more of his own thoughts and purposes than is convenient, and is reserved without appearing to be so; is judicious in forming his designs, wary and resolute in executing them, loses no opportunity of getting credit, reputation, and authority, and of promoting his interests; and makes so discreet an use of his power and of his fortunes, as to increase the esteem which men entertain of him, and the confidence which they repose in him, contracts useful friendships, takes all possible care not to offend and disoblige even the meanest person, and exposes himself to no danger or detriment which he can innocently and honourably avoid,

This sort of wisdom, when it acts in higher stations, and manages public affairs, is of great importance to civil society; and happy is he who possesses and exercises it so as at the same time to hold fast his integrity and piety; for many are the temptations to which his condition exposes him.

When this sort of wisdom hath for its object arts and sciences, and any of the various studies and occupations which require a liberal and learned education, and which every wise Government will honour and encourage, it is profitable,

fitable, as it enables us to be serviceable to our families and friends, and to acquire the decent conveniences of life, together with respect and reputation, and as it excludes idleness and foolish diversions, and keeps the mind occupied in a rational way. It is therefore a skill which we may desire and should endeavour to obtain. Yet this is by no means the wisdom which the Gospel recommends to us ; for the following reasons :

First, Because temporal advantages are not represented there as things of great moment and high value, nor have we leave to ask them of God without many restrictions and limitations.

Secondly, Because a man may be a good Christian, and secure his everlasting interests, without any extraordinary abilities, any right and title to the name of a wise man, in the worldly sense of the word.

Thirdly, Because this sort of wisdom, though it be no enemy to piety, yet if not carefully kept within due bounds, is apt to encroach and usurp upon it. He who is very wise as to this world, is continually enlarging the circle of his affairs, and the number of his acquaintances and dependents, hath much business upon his hands

of other persons, besides his own, is ever forming new designs and projects; and is so intent upon the accomplishment of them, that he finds little leisure and inclination for religious thoughts and the care of his soul. He in whose heart piety possesses the uppermost place, considers most of those things upon which vanity and ambition set a high value as not necessary to his happiness, or equal to his views and desires, thinks the time lost which is spent in the company of persons whose way of thinking, talking, and acting, he cannot approve, and esteems every occupation which contributes not to make him better and wiser and more useful, to be rather fit for the amusement of his hours of leisure, than for the serious employment of his life. There have been in all times some persons of great capacity and high station, and of a virtuous and pious temper, who have found the love of truth, and the pleasure of contemplating on things serious, spiritual and sacred, to grow upon them, and being fully sensible of the vanity and emptiness of other objects and designs, have, as they drew nearer to their end, retired from the busy world as much as they could discreetly, and have thought that they
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then might be said to live, when they lived to God, to religion, and to good works.

Yet ought not the wisdom, of which we are now speaking, to be condemned as unworthy of a Christian. We were born for this world, though not for this world only or chiefly; and they who would act a reputable part, and maintain a fair character in it, will find prudence and dexterity necessary accomplishments. As secular wisdom easily and almost insensibly slides down into craft and worldly-mindedness; so there is sometimes an injudicious and fanatical kind of pious fervour, which makes persons simple and children, in the worst sense of the word, which is so taken up with devotion and meditation and religious exercises, that it hath hardly leisure to get either daily bread or common sense.

Our Saviour says to his disciples; Beware of men; and, Be wise as serpents; and St. Paul exhorts Christians, to walk in wisdom towards the Gentiles. By which counsels may be meant that they should stand upon their guard, and use all honest methods, all arts consistent with the honour of God and the duties of religion, to secure their lives, liberties, fortunes and reputation, to expose and disappoint wicked

ed designs formed against them, to win over an adversary by affability and compliance, and to gain the esteem and affection of those with whom they should dwell. In the answers of our Saviour to his captious enemies, and in the behaviour of St. Paul recorded in the Acts of the Apostles, we have instances of innocent prudence defeating subtle malice. In the Book of Proverbs and in Ecclesiasticus are also contained many precepts relating not only to religious wisdom, but that wisdom which is more immediately and directly exercised about the concerns of this world.

There is, thirdly, another kind of wisdom, which used to be called Philosophy; and which may be said to be such a knowledge of nature in general, in particular of God and of man, and of the offices and duties of man in every station and circumstance, as reason is capable of discovering.

In search after this wisdom many illustrious men in the heathen world spent their days; and some of them, considering the difficulties under which they lay, must be acknowledged to have made a very commendable progress in it.

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It is not to be expected that the * Scriptures should speak in favour of this sort of wisdom, since they were revealed on purpose to supply the defects of it. And how fully they have answered that end, is apparent to all competent and impartial judges.

For the Philosophers were of so many sects, differed so widely, and wrote such a number of treatises, that a person who could have gathered out of their doctrines what was probable, and reasonable, and good, and have rejected the rest, must have had a learned education, abundant leisure, and so great a capacity as not to want their assistance and direction.

Again, Whosoever took a Philosopher for his guide, in matters of opinion and duty, unless he were wise and happy in his choice, was in danger of being made worse instead of better; for there was nothing so wicked which some of these teachers did not practise and approve, nothing so absurd which some of them did not affirm, and nothing so plain and certain, which some of them did not call in question, or deny.

* Vid. Clem. Alex. *Strom.* vi. 8. p. 771.

† Milton, *Par. Reg.* B. IV.

Add

Add to this, that the Philosophers usually wrote for the studious and contemplative, and discoursed in a way which the vulgar could not comprehend.

The Gospel teacheth morality infinitely better than human reason ever explained and enforced it, correcting the many mistakes into which the wisest Pagans fell, and adding discoveries which they were not able to make,

There is therefore, lastly, a wisdom called Wisdom unto Salvation; and this is what the Scriptures usually recommend to us under the name of wisdom, and what St. Paul means in the text; I would have you wise to that which is good.

This wisdom may be said to consist, first, in a knowledge of the truth of our religion. I mean not that all persons are obliged to know every argument which can be offered in behalf of religion, and every answer to the objections which are made to it: but all Christians ought, if it be possible, to be so far acquainted with the principal and common proofs of it, that their faith may be built upon a rational foundation.

Religion

Religion divides itself into natural and revealed.

Natural religion supposeth a God, a providence, and a future state. There are many proofs of the being of God ; but those which the Scriptures mention, and which are best adapted to all capacities, are the works of God, the greatness, distance, order, motion, regularity, and beauty of all the parts of the world, which could neither make themselves, nor conspire together to one certain end, but must have been formed and must be guided by a Mind most wise and good and powerful. To this may be added the general consent of mankind in all ages to acknowledge a Deity ; an Atheist excepted, who sometimes ariseth in the moral world, as a monster is sometimes brought forth in the natural world.

From the being of God appears the certainty of a future state ; for since God is, and since he is just, good, wise, and happy, and yet here below justice, goodness, and wisdom have not a due proportion of happiness above folly and vice, this must be a state of trial, which shall end in a state of retribution.

Revealed Religion, or Christianity, is also founded upon plain and strong evidence, of which

which a Christian, who would be wise in the religious sense, should not be ignorant. The proofs of Christianity are the concurrent testimony of Christians ever since the Gospel was first preached, the swift and successful progress of it, which was foretold long before by the Prophets, and which could not have been brought to pass without a divine assistance, a great variety of beneficial miracles performed in behalf of it, the holy lives and patient sufferings of the first Christians, the predictions of Christ and his Apostles which have been accomplished, and the excellence of Christian morality, which is so useful and so amiable, that a man who could in a good measure live up to it, and set it always before him for his rule, would probably, as far as he was observed and known, command the respect and esteem even of a wicked world, much more of reasonable and well-disposed persons. Such a religion, in the main, must be safe and true: for what harm can there be in doing good? what error in loving virtue? and what danger in resembling God?

Revealed religion divides itself into doctrine and precept, into belief and practice, into faith and works. Therefore religious wisdom consists,

sists; secondly, in a knowledge of the things which a Christian ought to believe, and of the things which he ought to do.

That part of revelation which relates to doctrine or opinion is briefly summed up in the Creed called The Apostles Creed, a profession of which, according to our Church, entitles a person to be baptized, and consequently to be a Christian. Indeed it becomes a Christian not to rest here, but to believe in general that whatsoever Christ and his Apostles have taught is true, and according to his leisure and abilities to make it the subject of his inquiries.

As to the practical part of the Gospel, what we ought to do, and what to avoid, in the station and circumstances in which we are placed, this ought to employ the thoughts of a Christian during the whole course of his life. It is not a difficult study, it is consistent with lawful affairs and innocent amusements. But it should never be forgotten and long neglected. We should frequently ask ourselves what we can do for the honour of God and the benefit of mankind, what temptations we ought more particularly to shun, as most dangerous, what disorderly affections we feel which should be subdued, and what good dispositions

positions we have which may be strengthened and improved.

And because to know our duty is nothing, unless we practise it, religious wisdom consists, thirdly, in a lively sense of the possibility, reasonableness, obligation, and advantage of performing the will of God, which will excite us to persevere in the observation of it.

I shall conclude with some remarks on the superiority of religious wisdom to all other kinds of wisdom.

And first it is manifest, and not necessary to be proved, that it surpasseth them in the object of its pursuit, namely, eternal happiness, a blessing more to be desired than human learning and worldly knowledge, and of more importance than the riches, honours, and pleasures of this short life.

In this also it surpasseth them, that it is more easy to be acquired than they are. The first sort of wisdom, of which I spake, which is worldly craft making its way and carrying on its designs with much art and little conscience, is not so obvious, so common, and so soon attained as some may imagine. Sagacity, and the means of improving it, are requisite to make a person eminent in this way, the first of which must be born with us, and the second depends
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upon a favourable concurrence of events which lies altogether out of our power. A man may be of such a temper that he shall stick at nothing, how vile and base soever, which can advance his interest, and yet be able to make no figure in the world, for want of parts; and he may have both a good understanding and a bad mind, and yet never be able to exert either to any purpose, for want of proper opportunities to cultivate the one, and employ the other.

The second kind of wisdom which I mentioned, namely the art of managing affairs with discretion and integrity, and of raising ourselves by ingenious industry, this also requires a particular genius, together with means and opportunities of exercising it; that is, it requires what many have not, and cannot procure.

As to the third sort of wisdom, which consists more in contemplation and study than in action, and is the fruit of a strong memory, a ready invention, a sound judgment and a close application, this is perhaps less common than either of the former, and there are few who are in an eminent degree masters of it.

But religious wisdom offers itself to all, and may be obtained by any one who sincerely desires it, and uses his endeavours to acquire it,

because it is more the work of the heart than of the head, and because God hath absolutely promised his assistance to those who strive to do his will. One of the Prophets, speaking of the Gospel of Christ, calls it an high-way, in which the way-faring men, though fools, shall not err; and in the book of Proverbs, Wisdom is represented as inviting all sorts of persons to receive her instructions, making no objections to their abilities, and requiring only a teachable temper. They therefore who so represent our duty, that they make it a subtle, an ingenious, and a learned thing to be a Christian, must be mistaken in their notions of Christianity, which with a noble and majestic simplicity affords matter to exercise and enlarge the brightest understanding, and yet condescends to the lowest capacity.

Herein also religious wisdom surpasseth all other wisdom, that it never fails to obtain its end. In this alone it can be truly affirmed: Seek, and ye shall find.

The worldly-minded man, though he be consummately wise in his generation, is liable to perpetual disappointments. It is impossible to be always secured against the folly, the craft, the perfidiousness, the violence, and the change-
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able humours of men ; to foresee future events ; to fix the unsteady course of human affairs, which are surprisngly altered by the smallest and seemingly accidental trifles ; to resist divine Providence, which blasts the designs of the strong and the subtle, and turns their might and their wisdom into weakness and folly. The art of compassing all our vain designs and desires is an art falsely so called, which can be reduced to no certain rules and regular system ; and what still shews the folly of it more manifestly, is, that whatsoever the children of this world seek, whether it be human learning and knowledge, or sensual enjoyments, or the favour of men, or wealth, or power, though they may find what they seek, yet they may be far from obtaining the end for which they sought it, namely happiness and peace of mind, a gift which God reserves for those who obey him, and suffers none besides himself to bestow.

But he whose chief view and purpose is to serve his Maker, and to save his own Soul, and who is as careful to accomplish what he hath undertaken, and as much in earnest about it as others are in forwarding their temporal concerns, is infallibly certain of success ; for God

is unchangeably the same, and the ways of securing his favour are invariable. This is enough to shew the superiority of true wisdom to every thing else which assumes that name : and yet there is another advantage attending it, which ought not to be forgotten ; and that is, that whilst worldly wisdom is often deprived of the only reward which it so industriously seeks, piety or true wisdom often finds advantages which it did not principally pursue, namely, the favour of the public, and an unenvied competence of the necessaries of life ; for, besides the interposition of divine Providence in behalf of the righteous, Virtue by its own nature hath a tendency to procure love, trust and esteem, and is the safest and the easiest way to acquire and to secure the things of this life, whereof we stand in need.

To conclude ; Religious wisdom is built upon a firm foundation, upon a few principles which are evident, plain, agreeable to reason, confirmed by experience, and, if authorities are of any weight, approved by the best and most competent judges ; principles which men, howsoever differing in other points, have usually consented to acknowledge. They are these :

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There is a God, wise, good, and powerful, who governs the world, and to whom we are accountable.

The soul subsists after death, and will be recompensed or punished according to its past behaviour.

A few years bear no proportion to eternity.

Life is short, and death is unavoidable.

Whatsoever may be lost in a moment, and at the best is of no long continuance, is of a small value.

Whatsoever our own reason and conscience condemn, it is absurdity, folly, and madness to practise.

Whatsoever produceth evil both to the body and to the mind, should be shunned, how pleasant soever it may be for the present.

Whatsoever we shall wish we had done, when grief and sickness, loss and disappointment, old age and death come upon us, that we ought to do in every part of life.

None ever repented, ever afflicted and reproached themselves that they had honoured God, and loved virtue, and done good offices to mankind, and cultivated their understanding, and lived soberly, and kept their passions in subjection to reason. But thousands have

been overwhelmed with sorrow and confusion for having done the contrary.

From these few obvious and manifest truths the consequence is no less evident, that our principal business and our greatest prudence is to acquire and preserve religious wisdom. Whatsoever wisdom is not consistent with this, and sets itself in opposition to it, is folly and distraction; and whatsoever wisdom is of a different kind, and is occupied about other pursuits, though it be innocent, though it be laudable, is as far inferior to this, as the earth is beneath the heavens.

S E R M O N

S E R M O N VI.

JAMES i. 5, 6.

If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not ; and it shall be given him : but let him ask in faith, nothing wavering.

THE wisdom of which St. James here speaks, and which the sacred writers so often recommend, is religious wisdom, wisdom unto salvation, and the end which it pursues is peace of mind in this life, and eternal happiness in the next. To fear the Lord, that is wisdom, and to depart from evil, that is understanding ; and whatsoever is not consistent with this, though the world may esteem it profound cunning and policy, yet is it neither wisdom nor understanding, but folly and madness in the sight of God, and in the style of the holy Scriptures.

St. James addresseth his Epistle to Christians, who were either then under persecu-

tion, or who saw it approaching. He bids them count it all joy, when they fall into these temptations or trials of their virtue, because their reward should be great, and an unfading crown of glory was reserved for them, if they suffered with patience and constancy for the sake of the Gospel : and then he adds ; If any of you lack wisdom, that is, the wisdom which shall direct you to act prudently and piously under difficult circumstances, and which shall enable you to pass through such trials with resignation and resolution, let him ask it of God.

However, since the life of a good Christian is one continued warfare against the enemies to his eternal happiness, and since there are trials in every condition, prosperous or adverse, and since none can acquit himself as he ought under these trials, of what kind soever they be, who is not wise in the religious sense, the wisdom of resisting any one sort of temptation may very well be extended so as to mean pious wisdom in general, or a practical knowledge of our duty and true interest, by which we shall overcome every thing that opposes and endangers our salvation.

This

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This wisdom, as I observed before, may be said to consist, first, in a knowledge of the truth of religion, at least, of the principal and common proofs of it.

It consists, secondly, in a knowledge of the things which a Christian ought to believe and to do.

And because to know our duty avails nothing, unless we practise it, religious wisdom consists, thirdly, in a lively sense of the possibility, reasonableness, obligation and advantage of performing what God requires, which will excite us to persevere in the observation of it.

I shall now examine and explain the several parts of the text, taking them in the same order in which they offer themselves to us.

If any of you lack wisdom,

Let him ask of God,

Who giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not,

And it shall be given him;

But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering.

If any of you lack wisdom.

To want wisdom, if we consider the words by themselves, may mean either, to have none at all, or not to have a sufficient measure of it.

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To have none, is the character of those persons who in the language of the Scriptures are called fools, men quite void of goodness, and even of any inclination to it. To such persons St. James doth not address himself, when he says; Brethren, if any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God; for they who are completely wicked, and consequently in a state of enmity with God, cannot be supposed capable of praying to him for spiritual blessings with faith, that is, with a just persuasion that they shall receive what they ask; but must first repent of their sins, and enter into a course of obedience, before they can acquire this free access to God, and this firm reliance upon him.

St. James therefore speaks to those who, having received the Gospel, are in a middle state between irreligion and Christian perfection, and advancing towards the latter, who have good dispositions, and an improvable temper, who reverence goodness, and desire to serve God, but have not made that progress in righteousness of which they are capable, and therefore have reason to distrust themselves, and to fear that in time of temptation they may yield and fall away, and earnestly to intreat the Almighty

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that he would assist and uphold them under such trials.

And here if we consider the many frailties and defects which stick close to the best of men, and the violent assaults of some temptations, and the great faults into which the most religious have sometimes fallen, and from which if they had not raised themselves by repentance, they must for ever have lost the favour of God, we may reasonably conclude that few, if any Christians, during this their state of probation, are so accomplished in this true wisdom, as to need no farther improvement. Every one therefore, how good soever, ought to think himself the person to whom the Apostle directs his advice, the person who wants wisdom, and who is here admonished to ask it of God; for one part of religious wisdom consists without question in entertaining lowly thoughts of ourselves, and it is safest to err, if we can so err, on the humble side. Severe is the rebuke which Christ gives to the church of Laodicea, in the Revelation: Thou sayest, I am rich, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.

If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God.

This

This must have seemed strange advice to those, who ascribed too much to their own reason, and relied too much on their own understanding. It must have seemed strange to many of the learned Pagans, who had no notion of offering such petitions to God, and who used to say that the conveniences of life, and health to enjoy them, were indeed favours to be requested of God, but that virtue and wisdom depended entirely upon ourselves. There have perhaps been some philosophical Christians, who for fear of ascribing too little to human liberty, have allowed too little to the divine influence, and have supposed that the revelation which God hath made to us in the Gospel, and the understanding and reason which he hath given us, is the only assistance, which we are to receive, and ought to expect from him. But since wisdom, religious wisdom, consists as much in obedience as in faith and knowledge, to ask wisdom of God cannot well mean, less than to desire that he would concur with our endeavours, and enable us by his inward assistance to perform an acceptable service. There is another extreme into which Christians have more usually departed. Many of them have supposed that all men are naturally and irresistibly prone to evil, and

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only evil, unless the divine grace interposes, which also acts irresistibly upon the few who are predestinated to eternal life. This is in effect and by consequence to charge our sins upon God, and to magnify his power and his dominion at the expence of his impartiality, his mercy, and his goodness, and to frame a system of religion which hath nothing to do with reason, and cannot stand the test of reason. As one error usually leads to another, the next deduction from these irresistible operations of the Spirit, was, that they were accompanied with an inward feeling and experience of them, by which the faithful could plainly distinguish them from the operations of their own mind; and then men, instead of judging of their faith by their works, judged of their works by their faith, or by a strong persuasion that they were moved by the Spirit, and that whatsoever the Spirit suggested must be good.

We shall avoid these two extremes, if we believe that the assistance of God, in time of need, is bestowed upon all who endeavour to secure it by making a good use of their natural powers, and of God's revealed will, that his holy Spirit conducts in a secret and effectual manner through all the changes and chances and

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and trials of life to a place of rest and peace those who are willing to be guided by the Gospel. This is a doctrine which reconciles heavenly grace with human liberty, and tends to produce faith, and hope, and humility, and reliance, and gratitude, and honest endeavour, and every good work.

For our encouragement to ask wisdom of God, St. James assures us, that if we ask, it shall be given us, for that God giveth liberally to all men, and upbraideth not.

That is, God, who is goodness itself, is free, as from all other imperfections, so from those imperfections which make men unwilling to confer benefits, ready to reproach those whom they oblige or have obliged, injudicious and humourfome in the choice of those to whom they grant their favours.

Men are often slow to give, and glad of any plausible excuse for withholding their hand; they often accompany their acts of kindness, when they condescend to perform them, with reluctance, haughtiness, and insolence, and upbraid at the same time that they relieve; they set too high a value upon the good offices which they have done; they expect most unreasonable submissions and compliances, and upon

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upon any failure this way, they make loud complaints of the baseness and ingratitude of the obliged person; they often bestow their favours not according to the wants or to the deserts of those whom they assist, but either with a view to some return, or as mere unthinking, capricious fancy directs. They will give to those who humour them, and flatter them, or to those in whom they observe a likeness of taste and disposition, a bent to the same amusements, or perhaps to the same vices. They will give to the bold and importunate against their inclination, purely to purchase repose at any rate; and with flights and forbidding coldness they will receive the person, who hath every thing that ought to recommend him to their esteem. There are persons in the world, who possessing several good qualities, yet have the weakness of entertaining unaccountable likings and dislikings, and the injudiciousness of choosing and preferring those who least deserve their favours, that is, of taking the children's bread, and casting it to the dogs. So that upon these accounts, if there were no other reason, it is, as our Saviour says, more blessed, a happier thing to give than to receive, and much more desirable to owe our

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daily

daily bread (after God) to our own hands, which never reproach us for what they bestow upon us, than to owe it to the courtesy of others. A state of absolute dependence, even at the best, and when attended with many advantages, is a kind of splendid slavery, in which the chains sit not the less heavy for being gilded. And this is one motive to honest industry, which opens a fair prospect to acquire a competency and to escape many a burdensome obligation.

A state of dependence upon God is liable to none of these inconveniencies. If we lay open our wants to men, perhaps they will not believe us, or will charge them to our own fault; but the things of which we stand in need, are known to God before we ask him. If we are petitioners to men, they perhaps will dislike us, though they cannot give any reason for it; but God is no respecter of persons, and invites us all to come to him for help, and is a Father to us in the best sense of the word, a Father who acts the part of a father. Earthly parents too often have their prejudices and partialities, making absurd distinctions between their children, and shewing most affection where perhaps they ought to shew the least; but the

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favour of God to us is ever proportionable to our behaviour towards him. To manifest his power and his wisdom, he hath made a variety of rational creatures of different endowments, and, to shew his goodness, he hath made them all capable of happiness, and gives them the necessary means to obtain it.

If we receive courtesies from the hands of men, they will perhaps expect returns from us which we cannot and ought not to make; God only demands of us gratitude, the easiest recompense, and an obedience which turns to our profit both here and hereafter.

Such encouragement we have to ask wisdom of God. One condition indeed there is, from which we cannot be excused, and that is a belief that we shall obtain our requests.—— Let him ask of God, and it shall be given him; but let him ask in faith, nothing wavering.

It ought to be observed, that in the Gospel, a firm persuasion of God's good will towards us is perpetually represented as absolutely necessary to make us capable of obtaining any favours from him. In the case of miracles, faith, that is a belief that the miracle should be performed, was often required both of the person who

wrought the miracle, and of the person on whom it was wrought.

When any came to our Saviour to be cured by him, and declared their belief of his power, he always healed them, and usually added these words: As thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee; Thy faith hath made thee whole; According to your faith be it unto you; Thy faith hath saved thee. When he met with an uncommon degree of faith, he both instantly rewarded it and highly commended it; and where he found a great and habitual want of it, he severely censured this defect, as far worse than a mere weakness, as a sure indication of a bad mind. He declared that he could do little or nothing for diffident people, and that they disqualified themselves for receiving his favours. He required of his disciples an absolute trust and reliance on their heavenly Father, and also on him, as on their Lord, and Master, and Mediator, by whom they should have access to the Father, and in whose name, through faith, they should obtain their petitions, and never be disappointed. To give proofs and instances of this, would be to repeat to you no small part of the New Testament.

In

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115

In prayer also, the same condition is required, and without it we must not expect to obtain our petitions. All things, says our Lord, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive: What things soever ye desire when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them: and St. James, in the text; Let a man ask, and it shall be given him, if he ask in faith, nothing wavering.

Upon which it is natural to make these two inquiries; Why doth God so strictly require this faith? and, Why is it so acceptable to him, that he rewards it with conferring upon us all that we ask?

God requires of us a belief that we shall obtain our petitions, because he hath given us abundant reason to believe it. The light of nature discovers that he is good: the Gospel represents him to us merciful beyond expression and imagination, and Love itself. Most justly therefore may he require of us to believe that he will at least fulfil his promises.

Another reason why God demands such faith is, because upon a belief of his paternal care and kindness all religion is founded. If we suspect that he will not grant us the things necessary, we

must doubt of his mercy and goodness, and justice, and veracity; and if we doubt of these things, we shall disregard him, it may be, and put him far from our thoughts; at the most, we may fear him, but we can never love him, and honour him, and pay him a willing and a rational service.

A high degree of enthusiasm, which is mere frenzy, and capable of imagining any absurdity to be true, may make a man think himself to be in the favour of God, whilst he daily and deliberately offends him; and hope that he shall receive whatsoever he asks of him, before he hath obtained remission of sins. But, such cases excepted, no wicked person can easily flatter himself that his requests shall be heard, whilst his life is unreformed, and cannot pray to God with that faith which is here mentioned. God therefore, who would have us to live that we may obtain future happiness, requires of us a confidence in him which must spring from an honest mind, and which no impenitent sinner can be well supposed to entertain.

This observation takes off an objection, which might be made to the text, and to other like places of Scripture.—Let a man ask of God, and it shall be given him. Let him ask. Is that

that enough? No, certainly it is not. He must use his own endeavours to acquire the desired object of his prayers. If he asks his daily bread, he must labour for it. If he asks forgiveness of sins, he must repent and amend. If he asks that he may not fall into temptation, he must keep himself as remote as he can from all inducements to sin. If he asks spiritual wisdom, he must take care to be acquainted with his duty, and then to practise suitably to his knowledge. All this is contained in these words, Let him ask in faith, or is deducible from them by obvious consequence. He who sincerely resolves and endeavours to serve God, may with just confidence beg support, and relief, and direction of him, and believe that he shall obtain them; but he who doth nothing on his part that he ought to do, can have no hopes that his prayers should be successful.

The other question is, Why is this faith so acceptable to God, that he rewards it with granting our petitions?

What excellence can there be in faith? say some irreligious persons. Faith is a belief, either without or with grounds. If we believe without reasonable motives, and due conviction, it is, say they, a childish weakness; and if we

believe, because upon examination the thing appears certain, there is nothing so commendable in it, for we cannot help it, and refrain from believing; and therefore we deserve no more praise or recompense on that account, than he who understands arithmetic and geometry, for believing the truths relating to numbers and to figures.

This is mere cavil and sophistry, which falls to pieces upon the slightest discussion. In the holy Scriptures faith is frequently and justly commended, and declared to have the divine approbation and favour. If it be asked, Why so? the answer is, because it produceth many good moral effects; because it is the greatest honour which we can pay to God; and because it is one of the best proofs of a well-disposed mind.

1. A firm faith in God is the guardian of all other virtues, and suffers us not to be seduced by worldly hopes, or deterred by worldly fears from the performance of our duty; and as it is stronger or weaker, such will be its influence on our practice. It must needs therefore be of great importance, since our obedience depends upon it,

2. We

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2. We cannot honour any man more than by placing an entire confidence in him. This is to pay him more true respect, and to shew him more love than can be expressed by all the commendations and fair speeches which we are able to invent and pour out. The same is true with relation to God. To be persuaded that he will give us all things needful, unless we force him to withdraw his favour from us; and if we ask and obtain not, to lay the blame where it ought to lie, upon ourselves; to believe that upon our amendment he is ever ready to receive us; and carefully to serve him from thenceforward, with a firm persuasion that obedience never loses its reward; this is to profess in our hearts and by our lives that we esteem him to be all-knowing, wise, just, holy, and good, and whatsoever is venerable and lovely.

3. A steady faith is also a victory over many doubts which the world and the flesh usually raise in vicious minds. He whose passions are under no restraint, whose thoughts and desires are fixed upon things unlawful or vain, and who hath no taste for those entertainments which reason and virtue and piety afford, such an one either disbelieves the very principles of religion, or doubts of the truth of them, or gives a faint

and cold assent to them, which hath no influence upon his actions, and serves only to reprove him, when he is leaving this world.

God is no object of our senses; no man hath seen him, or can see him: he dwells in light inaccessible, and clouds and darkness are round about him. Faith is able to pierce that darkness and that light, and through it to discover those perfections which excite in us hope and reliance, and love and gratitude. But a vicious mind is not used to look so high, or to meditate on things pure and spiritual. Scarcely can it believe that God is; much less that he is a rewarder of those that diligently seek him.

The heavens indeed proclaim his power and glory, and the firmament sheweth his handy-work, and day and night in their turns declare it. But the vicious man hath no eyes to see the Creator in his works, and no capacity to comprehend this silent language of nature.

The recompense also, the principal recompense, which God proposeth to the obedient, is like himself, invisible: it lies in a distant region, which no eye hath seen, no foot hath trodden; and before we can take possession of it, we must in appearance cease to be, lie down in the dust, and leave that which a worldly-minded

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minded man accounts his all, and beyond which he hath no views.

To believe in Him, who is thus concealed from us, to think him good and merciful to us, how inconvenient soever our present state may be, and to trust to a distant reward after our dissolution, to believe this in a manner which shall have a due influence on all our actions, though it be perfectly agreeable to reason, is so hard a task to a mind prone to sin, and enslaved to the present evil world, that it is a considerable victory obtained over our inordinate affections, an effect of sound judgment and sober consideration, and an indication of a good heart joined to a good understanding.

S E R M O N

MEMORANDUM

dated 18th November 1914. The following is a summary of the information received from the various sources mentioned in the above.

The first source is the report of the local authorities, who state that the number of cases of the disease has increased considerably since the beginning of the year.

The second source is the report of the medical officers, who state that the disease is of a mild nature, and that the mortality is very low.

The third source is the report of the sanitary authorities, who state that the disease is not communicable, and that it is not necessary to take any special precautions.

The fourth source is the report of the public health officers, who state that the disease is not dangerous, and that it is not necessary to take any special precautions.

The fifth source is the report of the local press, who state that the disease is not dangerous, and that it is not necessary to take any special precautions.

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S E R M O N VII.

PROVERBS iii. 17.

Her ways are ways of pleasantness.

THIS perhaps is one of the most common subjects of moral and practical divinity, which hath been so often discoursed upon, that it may seem to be worn out with using. But yet a common subject, if it be a copious subject, may be treated in no common manner, and may afford some useful remarks which escape ordinary and superficial observation. Thus, in the text, though the truth contained in it hath been very often set forth, the objections to that truth, which are many, have not been so frequently considered and confuted.

When Solomon observes that the ways of wisdom, that is of piety, are ways of pleasantness, he seems to mean that this is not only the excellence, but the peculiar excellence of religion,

religion, and consequently that the ways of folly or of vice, all things considered, are not ways of pleasantness. For if what he says of the one were true of the other also, if there were as much pleasure in disobedience, as there is in righteousness, the argument by which he recommends the latter would lose part of its force. We may therefore suppose more to be understood than is expressed in the text, and the sense of it to be, that the good shall infallibly enjoy a satisfaction and a delight, of which the wicked will as certainly be deprived.

Since pleasure, present pleasure, is naturally and earnestly desired by every creature, the motive to religion which Solomon sets before us is adapted to all capacities and to all tempers. Goodness is proposed as the duty, and pleasure is promised as the reward, a reward which the World and Satan are not able to give us, and which God alone can bestow. This seems enough to engage any person to be good who believes it to be true. He who is thoroughly persuaded that he shall be happy for the present by doing his duty, and that if he be wicked, he shall continually suffer for it even in this life, will surely choose the good part, because his reason and his desires will both lead him to it.

Indeed

Indeed the difficulty is, to excite in men an active and a practical persuasion of these truths; which I shall attempt by endeavouring.

I. To shew that the ways of religion are ways of pleasantness:

II. To shew that the ways of Sin are not ways of pleasantness:

III. To answer the objections which wicked men have made, or may make, to these assertions.

I. The ways of religion are ways of pleasantness. The proofs of it are these.

1. There is a pleasure in the duties relating immediately to God; such as love, faith, reliance, resignation, hope, prayer, and thanksgiving. These are all apparently cheerful duties, and, when duly performed, must be attended with the highest satisfaction.

For to love God is to reverence his perfections, to desire his favour, to imitate him as far as we can, and to serve him willingly. From such a temper there must arise peace of mind, and a serious and lasting pleasure. Add to this, that such love towards God is accompanied with a persuasion that God loves us, which doubtless is the most valuable of all blessings.

To

To have faith in God is to believe what we are taught in the Scripture concerning him, chiefly concerning his promises to his servants of forgiveness, protection and assistance in this world, and of eternal life in the next.

And what can yield more satisfaction than such a faith dwelling in a virtuous mind?

To rely upon God is to free ourselves from many sorrows and evils, from despondence and despair, from anxious apprehensions of future events, and repining discontent under our present condition, by casting our cares upon our heavenly Father, with a persuasion that he will give us what upon the whole is best for us, and that we shall make him our protector and friend by placing this honourable confidence in him. This is a disposition, which though God neither commanded nor rewarded it, yet would be its own recompense; though it were an error, yet it would be a pleasing error, since he who imagines himself happy, is happy as long as the imagination lasts.

Resignation is the art of lessening the evils of life, and of bearing them patiently, from the consideration that they are unavoidable, that the best of men are not secured from them, that they are of a short continuance, that they

fall

fall out by the permission or the appointment of God, that they are useful to us even for the present, and in the end will turn to our advantage. And this also is a temper which even they would desire to enjoy, who will not use the means to acquire it.

Hope looks at future advantages, and makes them in some manner present, by persuading us that we shall possess them; hope is the support of the mind in dangers and difficulties, the spring and motive of action, and the parent of cheerfulness. All this it is, when its views reach no farther than the present state; but the hope of a Christian, which extends beyond time and the world, must surpass the other in its effects as much as in its object.

Prayer is founded upon a supposition that something profitable may be obtained by it, and that he to whom we apply is good and merciful; and therefore the prayers even of those whom the sense of guilt and the fear of punishment compel to this duty must produce some ease, proportionable to the degree of faith and hope that accompanies them. But the prayer of the righteous is the conversation of a son with a father, an access without fear or diffidence, an application secure from a denial, a certainty

certainty that every thing fit to be granted or desired shall be obtained.

Lastly, Thanksgiving is gratitude, and gratitude is an easy and an agreeable duty. He who is ungrateful to God or to man hath a dark mind, and base inclinations, and can love nothing besides his unlovely self; his delights must be, like himself, sensual and brutish, and arising from things which give less pleasure than pain. But he who is grateful is in some degree recompensed even by the lively sense of the benefits which he receives. Thus there is a pleasure in the acts of religion which have God more immediately for their object.

2. There is also a pleasure in those occupations in which a virtuous and religious man will be frequently employed.

Almost all persons, they especially who have had a good education, spend some part of their time in acquiring knowledge of one sort or other, in reading and in reflecting. Now where the treasure is, there is the heart also; and such as the temper is, such is the favourite study: and consequently good persons will often meditate upon truths worthy to dwell in an upright mind. The perfections of the Almighty, the knowledge of human nature,

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nature; the duties of man, as discoverable by reason; the works of God, in which his power, skill, and goodness shine forth; the holy Scriptures, which teach wisdom unto salvation; and any study which makes us useful in our generation, improves the understanding, and corrupts not the heart, will employ our time, if we act like rational creatures, as far as the necessary affairs of life permit, and our natural and acquired abilities enable us. In these occupations there is much pleasure; they engage the mind in prudent and honourable designs, they deliver it from mean cares and trifling views, they preserve it from indolence and sloth, they compose the passions, they strengthen the judgment, they have the approbation of conscience, and they also divert the imagination. * Objects which are great and noble communicate some degree of their own splendor and dignity to the soul which contemplates upon them, teach it to entertain a due value for itself, and to despise things transitory, and at the same time overflow it with a silent and serious joy. We are pleased with the sight of

* *Erigimur, elatiores fieri videmur; humana despiciamus, cogitantisque supera ac celestia, hæc nostra ut exigua et minima contemnimus. Cicero.*

any thing that is grand and splendid in the visible world; we are more pleased when our thoughts are swallowed up in eternity and immensity, in the incomprehensible perfections of the Author of all, the First and the Last, who was, and is, and is to come.

3. There is a pleasure in that behaviour towards others, and that manner of prosecuting our worldly affairs, which ever accompany a religious disposition.

He who loves and fears God, will not have inclination or leisure to pursue the things of this life with immoderate earnestness, nor will he set an immoderate value upon them, much less will he acquire them by infamous methods, though it were to gain the whole world; nor will he, on the other hand, fall into want by laziness or extravagance, but will honestly labour to support himself and those committed to his care, and to do good, and to be useful in his station. In such a way of life much uneasiness is avoided, and much satisfaction must arise. Either pleasure is to be found in calm integrity, and honest industry, and acts of beneficence, and moderate desires, or there is no such thing as pleasure in this world.

4. There

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(4.) There is, lastly, a pleasure in performing our duty to ourselves, as it relates to the body and to the passions.

As to the body, a wise and good person is his own physician, so far I mean as to observe the rules of sobriety, and to avoid all those excesses which bring on pain and sickness, and shorten and embitter human life. True it is that temperance will not always secure health, and that the body, when its constitution is bad, makes the soul pay dear for her lodging. But in this case, it is no small comfort to know that our distempers are not of our own procuring, and that we cannot charge them upon our vices. Thus we are sure to escape one sore evil; for if sickness be a grievous thing, self-reproach is still more grievous.

As to the passions, he who keeps them in good order, secures to himself peace of mind; for when they are indulged and suffered to grow unruly, they are, like spoilt children, the grief and torment of the parent, and prey upon the heart that gave them birth.

II. The second thing to be proved is, That the ways of sin are not ways of pleasantness: and this I shall endeavour briefly to shew by a few general remarks.

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1. First,

1. First, it must be acknowledged, that no man can be happy who acts against his own conscience, and who suspects that a day of judgment will come, when his evil deeds shall be exposed and punished; and consequently the greater part of sinners must be deemed miserable even for the present; for, like the Devils, they also believe and tremble. They know that they offend a just and powerful God, and they fear the sad consequences. They have not indeed these fears always upon them, for then they would not continue their evil courses; they put away such thoughts by various arts; but yet from time to time, at a serious hour, when any loss, disappointment, or sickness befalls them, these apprehensions usually awake and torment them; and this torment, endured even for an hour, hath a bitterness in it which outweighs the pleasures of their whole life. The pleasures of sense we can well enough spare, but the pain of a wounded mind is insupportable; and this pain almost all sinners suffer. They may seem contented in their situation, approvers of their own conduct, and void of care and consideration; but it is frequently a false appearance. Let us believe God rather than men. He who made us, and knows us
better

better than we know ourselves, says that there is no peace for the wicked.

2. There is another sort of sinners, who are few in number when compared with the former, who feel no remorse of conscience, and who have persuaded themselves that there is no future state, and no Governor of the world. These have indeed shaken off some fears, but then they have lost the greatest comfort of life, which is hope. The days of our mortality are always few, and often evil; and the most prosperous condition is not without some labour and sorrow. The good have their share in these evils; but no calamity can take from them the expectation of happiness in a better world. To this expectation a virtuous mind hath recourse; on this it rests, and by this it is supported. The first Christians had nothing besides this that they could call their own; but this was to them in the stead of every thing else; by this they were enabled to be more than conquerors over enemies whom few sinners dare look in the face.

To this hope the wicked persons, of whom we now speak, are strangers. Their hope is to die soul and body, to perish entirely and eternally, to become as though they had never been. This is their whole support and their only re-

fuge; this must cheer them in their journey through a troublesome world; this must enliven their pleasures in the days of health and prosperity, comfort them in distress, make their bed in sickness, and fortify them against an approaching dissolution. But this it cannot perform. No man can delight in a belief that things go according to the course of I know not what blind and stupid, stubborn and unrelenting Nature; the most wicked man cannot take pleasure in this notion, though his vices may make him hope that it is true, because it seems to him the lesser evil of the two. No man can rejoice in the thoughts of annihilation, though his fears of punishment may make him wish that death may put an end to him, and shelter him from offended justice. The expectation of perishing utterly, and falling into a state of insensibility, presents no agreeable prospect to the soul, which hath a natural desire of immortality. It must damp all the pleasures that this world can bestow, and be a present chastisement to unbelievers. *Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die*, is a gloomy and uncomfortable reflection; it hath been sometimes uttered with a cheerful countenance, but always with an aking heart,

3. Another

3. Another reason which I shall barely mention, why the ways of unrighteousness are not the ways of pleasantness, is, that every action contrary to reason and to religion is, if not always, yet certainly for the most part, hurtful even in this life. This noxious quality of sin ariseth from the course of nature, the constitution of things, and the necessary connection of causes and effects; and therefore is one proof of a Deity and a Providence.

III. Let us now consider the objections which wicked men have made, or may make, to these propositions.

I. Those sinners who enjoy health and prosperity, and can gratify their inclinations, would say without question, that their ways are ways of pleasantness; that every man best knows whether he be pleased or displeased, contented or dissatisfied, cheerful or uneasy; that if he declares himself happy, others ought to believe him, at least ought not to contradict him; and that they are impertinent, unmannerly, and absurd people, who would endeavour to persuade him out of his senses.

Now it must be acknowledged, that there is a pleasure in sin, else there would be no deceitfulness in it, no difficulty in forsaking it, and

no struggles in the change from vice to virtue. It must also be confessed that he who delights in his condition is happy, as long as the persuasion or the delusion continues. But if this happiness proves short-lived, and ends in bodily pain, or in the loss of friends, or in want and infamy, or in regret, shame, and confusion, in remorse of mind, and horrible apprehensions, which is frequently the case, the man is unhappy upon the whole, and unhappy at the last in his own judgment.

2. Again, Sinners may object that good men, who affirm from their own experience that there is pleasure in righteousness, are grave dissemblers, who conceal the real state of their minds; that a religious person is one who, partly through dread of future punishment, and partly through hope of future rewards, is led to act contrary to his inclinations, to do violence to his passions, and to sacrifice his present ease and satisfaction to these views,

This objection we have already shewed to be unreasonable, by setting forth the many and undeniable advantages which arise from a good life. We will therefore only observe this: The wicked, when they declare that they take a pleasure in humouring their depraved appetites, expect

expect to be believed. They ought then, in return, to believe the sober and serious, who affirm that they also find satisfaction in following the dictates of reason, and the laws of God. They should consider that pleasure is as various as the humour and the taste of men. What is agreeable to one, is pain and punishment to another; and even what we love in one part of our life, we sometimes dislike and loath at another.

3, Sinners may say that good men, when they set forth the pleasures of righteousness or religious wisdom, either deceive, or are deceived; that if they speak as they think, they seem indeed to be happy, but are happy only in imagination; that therefore the pleasures of a pious mind, if there be such, arise from a strong fancy, from fanaticism and enthusiasm.

If we should admit even this to be true, which certainly is not true, still it appears that a virtuous person takes a surer way to happiness than a sinner. The happiness of a sinner depends upon health, upon riches, upon the gratitude, friendship, and love of vicious persons, which are all very precarious. The happiness of a religious man, if we suppose it to depend

pend upon the approbation of his own conscience, and the hopes of immortal life, and a persuasion that God loves him and takes care of him, is fixed upon a much firmer foundation. These are a possession which he can secure to himself, and which none can take from him.

4. Another objection which Sinners may make to the doctrine of the text, is, that though it may be plausible in appearance, and speculatively considered, yet the true test of it is experience; and experience shews these boasted pleasures of religion not to be very common amongst Christians. It will be found, upon examination, that religious persons are not only liable to the same crosses and calamities with others, but in a great measure to the same passions, disorders, and weaknesses of mind, to cares and sorrows, to discontent and dejection, to a great fondness of life, and to as great a fear of death. Therefore, will sinners say, tell us not what comfortable effects religion must produce upon the minds of men, but fairly acknowledge, what is fact, that it conduceth very little to their present contentment, and deserves not the high commendations which are usually bestowed upon it.

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To this objection it may be answered ;

If it be true, for the most part, that the ways of religion are ways of pleasantness, it is enough. In all such general affirmations, some particular cases are to be excepted. Therefore though some honest and good persons, through disorders of body and mind, are in uneasiness and sorrow, still it remains undeniable that goodness produces peace, and hope, and contentment, since it usually and naturally produceth them ; and where it accidentally fails of its effect, a future compensation shall abundantly make up the deficiency.

But moreover, when the Scriptures declare that there is pleasure in righteousness, we should consider what they mean by righteousness, and who the person is to whom they make this promise. It is he who carefully endeavours to observe all God's commandments, and to make a constant progress in virtue. But who-soever falls short of this, must lose much of the pleasure which religion affords. If his obedience be interrupted by wilful transgressions, fear and self-reproof, shame and sorrow will succeed, in proportion to the sins which he hath committed, and to the time which he hath wasted under their dominion, and will disturb

disturb him more or less for the remaining part of his life, and allay the satisfaction which he finds in returning to his duty. This is too often the case; our practice agrees not enough with our belief and with our knowledge; our hearts are divided between earth and heaven; our desires are inconstant and inconsistent; we serve many masters, and consequently we serve none regularly, and with the whole mind; we have religion enough to give us uneasiness, and not enough to give us happiness; enough to make us fear God, and not enough to make us love him. Thence it comes to pass that few are acquainted with that joy and peace of mind which only arise from an uniform obedience and an habitual goodness.

5. Lastly, Sinners may object that some duties of Christianity are harsh and disagreeable, as repentance, and self-denial, and mortification; and that therefore the ways of religion cannot be ways of pleasantness.

A solemn repentance for heinous crimes is not to be reckoned amongst the original duties of religion. Neither the Laws of God, nor the constitution of human nature, have made it necessary, but the guilt which men have contracted by habitual transgressions, and from which

which they can by no other method be absolved. God, who is not willing that any should perish, invites the greatest offenders to return to him. In that return from sin to righteousness there is difficulty; yet even at the same time there is a satisfaction arising from reflections upon the danger which is escaped and the recompence which is secured by amendment.

There is another kind of repentance, which is the duty of the very best persons, and in which there is nothing disagreeable. It must be a pleasure to one of an ingenuous disposition daily to own his faults and failings to his heavenly Father, and humbly to ask forgiveness.

As of repentance, so of mortification or self-denial, there are two sorts. The first consists in mortifying our vices, and refraining from things forbidden by reason and religion, and contrary to our present interest. If in this we find any difficulty, it must be charged entirely upon ourselves.

The second kind of mortification or self-denial consists in loving and using with moderation the good things of this life which in a certain degree are lawful. This is a duty very agreeable to reason, and very suitable both to the

the body and to the mind. We ought to have practised it though God had not required it, because the things which we possess are precarious ; because death will part us from them ; because too great an affection towards them makes us miserable when the separation comes ; because the pleasures of the senses, if not discreetly used, and sometimes avoided, grow insipid, hurt the health, and stupefy the understanding ; because he who is a slave to his diversions and to his appetites will unavoidably be ignorant, foolish, and despicable.

Therefore wise men in all ages and places, Pagans as well as Christians, have both recommended and practised this duty ; some through religious principles, others through temper and by choice ; some to please God, others to please themselves. We call it mortification, or self-denial, and often represent it to our thoughts as a rigid and severe virtue ; but there is nothing austere and uncomfortable in it, except the name that it bears ; and it might justly be called the art of lessening our wants by contracting our desires, and of securing to ourselves as much happiness as should be expected, and can be found, here below, *in this vale of tears of a sinful, &c. &c. &c.*

S E R M O N

S E R M O N VIII.

MARK X. 14.

Suffer the little children to come to me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of God. Verily, I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein.

THREE of the Evangelists inform us, that young children were brought to Christ by their parents or friends, that he should touch them, that he should put his hands upon them and pray, that he should pray for them and bless them. In Genesis we read that Jacob laid his hands upon the sons of Joseph, and blessed them; and we may observe, that it was a custom among the Jews to present their children to illustrious persons remarkable for their piety, that they might lay their hands upon them, and recommend them to God's favour

favour by their prayers. Hence it is evident that the parents or friends of these children believed Christ to be one who had a just title to the character which he assumed; for, if they had not entertained this opinion of him, they would never have desired his blessing for their children.

And yet the disciples, it is said, rebuked those who brought them. The writers of the Gospels have not told us why the disciples were offended at those who paid this respect to Christ; so that conjectures only and probable reasons may be offered concerning it; these for instance:

The disciples seem to have been at that particular time conversing with Christ upon an important subject, and full of attention to his doctrine; and they might be offended at the importunity of these persons who interrupted the discourse.

The disciples might think such actions to be beneath the dignity of their Master. He came into the world to instruct men in the most momentous concerns, to explain and improve the Law, to vindicate it from false interpretations, to reject frivolous and pernicious traditions, to call sinners to repentance, to shew forth his power

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power by working miracles, and healing all manner of diseases. In these things they might think his office to consist in such a degree, that it could not be proper for the great Prophet, the Messias, the Son of God, to condescend to spend his valuable time in laying his hands upon young children. It is said indeed, that Jesus, at the beginning of his ministry, baptized the people; but then, as St. John observes particularly, he did it not himself, but by his disciples:

They might then imagine that these persons were unwelcome to their Master, who went about doing good, and was so much taken up with other and higher employments; they might think it proper to discourage them from resorting to him upon this occasion, lest others should follow their example, and become troublesome to him by their numbers:

Or they might have some dislike of the parents of those children, and think them unworthy of such a favour:

Or they might fancy this to be an useless ceremony, because they had never heard their Master recommend it.

Whatsoever might be the reasons which moved the disciples to reprimand and drive off

these petitioners, their Master did by no means approve their behaviour. When Jesus saw it, he was much displeased, and said unto them, Suffer the little children to come to me, and forbid them not. And he took them up in his arms, put his hands upon them, and blessed them.

It was usual with our Saviour, and it is indeed his peculiar manner, to raise moral instruction from every incident and object which came in his way, and offered itself to his view. This method of teaching was striking and familiar, and excellently adapted to make a strong impression upon the minds of his hearers, and to fix in their memories his discourses, together with the subjects and circumstances which gave rise to them. Hence also Christians may learn to imitate the example of their Lord in this frame and temper of mind, and to make a moral and religious use of the occurrences of life, by which many things seemingly indifferent, and often passed over as such, may be sanctified to good purposes. Thus for example, whilst one views the works of the creation with careless unconcern, or with frivolous curiosity, another sees and adores in them the hand of the great Artificer.

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Our Lord then, as he readily condescended, and complied with the honest desire of the parents in blessing their children, so he took occasion also at the same time to acquaint his disciples, and those who were present, with some of the qualifications necessary for those who would join themselves to him; a matter of great importance, and highly concerning all those to whom the Gospel should ever be preached. Suffer, says he, the little children to come to me; for of such is the kingdom of God. Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein.

By the kingdom of God is here meant the Church of Christ, into which they who are admitted are intitled, if they observe his precepts, to eternal life in the world to come: to enter into the kingdom of God, is to be a true disciple of Jesus Christ. Our Lord therefore declares, that none are fit to be his followers, unless they possess the dispositions usually observable in young children.

From the text thus far explained, it appears to have been commonly thought by the Jews, that the prayers of pious persons might procure blessings from God upon those for whom they

were made. This opinion was entertained by those who brought their children to Christ, and he confirmed them in that opinion by complying so readily with their request. In the New Testament Christians are exhorted to pray for each other, and mention is made of the usefulness and the efficacy of such prayers. St. Paul frequently prays for the brethren to whom he addresses his Epistles, and desires that they also would pray for him: and this practice is well adapted to kindle and cherish that mutual love and charity which is the distinguishing character of Christianity. In the Old Testament we find Patriarchs and Prophets and holy men offering up prayers for their children, for their friends, for their country; and what regard God shewed to their requests, appears in many places of Scripture, and in the examples of Abraham, of Moses, of Job, of other persons eminent for their piety. In Ezechiel, God, to testify how greatly he was offended at his people, and how firmly resolved to punish them, declares, that even though Noah, Daniel, and Job lived amongst them, they should not be able by their intercession to save any besides themselves. So in Jeremiah it is said upon a like occasion, that though even Moses and Samuel stood before God to make
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supplication for the people, it should not avail; and the Prophet is forbidden to pray for them. Thus the greatness of their sin and of the divine displeasure is described in a manner which at the same time shews how ready God is to hear the intercession of the good, and for their sakes to shew favour even to those who deserve it not. Under the Mosaic dispensation, though present rewards were promised to obedience, yet the best men were not always distinguished from others by prosperity, nor had they constantly those temporal advantages which command the respect of the world. But that virtue might be revered, God, by frequently granting the requests which good men offered up to him for others, raised them to a much higher dignity than power and wealth could ever gain. This therefore is one of the considerable rewards of piety, that the righteous are represented in the Scriptures, not only as the servants, but as the friends of God, as able not only to procure blessings for themselves, but for others also; and in this appears, what God says to Eli, Them that honour me, I will honour.

What our Lord says concerning the qualifications required of those who hope to be his

disciples, may be misunderstood and wrested to a bad sense. Thus, for example, some may reason upon it ; The doctrine of the text is this in general, that the servants of Christ ought to be like young children. Children are credulous ; they will believe any thing that is told them by their instructors ; Christians ought to have the same dispositions, and to receive with the same submission doctrines relating to religion ; they should believe whatsoever their teachers recommend as necessary to be believed. Children are not capable of judging for themselves ; they ought to be under the direction of their friends ; so ought Christians to resign their judgment to those who have the care of their souls. The powers of reason are weak and unactive in children ; so ought they to be in Christians, as to their spiritual affairs ; they should persuade themselves, that it is enough for them to believe, and that the most perfect obedience consists in sacrificing their reason, which hath nothing to do in matters of faith, and only serves to lead into error.

Thus some have reasoned upon the subject, particularly in the Church of Rome, whose favourite doctrine is an implicit submission to the decisions of bold men, who call themselves the

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Catholic Church, and who pretend to have Infallibility residing amongst them somewhere or other, though where to fix it they know not.

And here let me observe to you, that the Gospel is not calculated for those who either wickedly abuse their reason, or entirely discard it. The political Christian wrests and perverts the Scriptures to his own dishonest purposes; and the Bigot, lying at the mercy of every Impostor, hath in reality no faith at all; for a man can no more believe with another man's faith, than he can satisfy his hunger by seeing another man eat. To both these persons the Gospel shines in vain, as the sun doth to those who are blind, or to those who are shut up in a dark room. But be it observed also, that a modest, teachable, and tractable temper is equally remote from both these extremes. I should be glad of a guide, if I were travelling in roads with which I was not well acquainted; but if my guide endeavoured to lead me down a precipice, or into the deep waters, I should choose to trust to my own senses, rather than to his.

The meaning of our Saviour's words in the text is not difficult to be found out by those who seek it impartially, and have no indirect ends to serve, and no favourite notion to esta-

bliss. The doctrine laid down there in general terms is, that true believers are to be like young children. The question is, In what ought they to resemble them? And the answer to this question is soon discovered, when we consider the qualities which are usually found in young children. They are of two sorts: first, defects and natural imperfections: secondly, amiable and good dispositions.

The defects natural to that age are, want of reason, want of judgment, a credulous temper, an easiness to be deluded. It cannot possibly be supposed that our Lord should recommend these defects to men as worthy of their imitation. Hard would be the condition of Christians, if their religion must make them less knowing than they would have been without it, if it obliged them to be like idiots, and to live and die children in the worst sense of the word. The human understanding is indeed confined to narrow bounds, and reason left to itself seldom makes a great progress in divine truths, and God hath revealed to us things which by our own abilities we could not have discovered. But reason, no less than revelation, is a good gift which cometh from above, and is not to be rejected because it cannot search

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out and bring to light every truth, or because, like all other things that are good, it may be perverted and abused.

If Religion consists in ignorance and credulity, how shall Christians search the Scriptures, discern between true and false teachers, prove all things, and be ready to give an answer to those who shall ask them a reason of the faith that is in them? These things require a due and diligent exercise of the powers of the mind, and Christians are not only permitted but commanded to cultivate and improve them. Be not children in understanding, says the Apostle; in malice or in wickedness be ye children, but in understanding be men.

Indeed it is too plain to want much proof, that the imperfections of children are not Christian accomplishments. Let us consider the amiable qualities and good dispositions which are often observable in children, and which our Lord certainly had in view, when he required of all who would be his followers to resemble young children.

Amongst these we may reckon, in the first place, innocence.

I know there are those who will hardly allow innocence to infants: but I find that Christ
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and his Apostles have allowed it. It must be acknowledged, that the innocence of infants, as it ariseth from an incapacity of transgressing, is a negative quality, which cannot be called, strictly speaking, a good disposition. And yet it is not an imperfection; it is rather something amiable, and worthy of imitation: a child, in this respect, was, in our Saviour's judgment, a proper emblem of a good Christian, whom it behoved to be free from all habits of sin, and, in that sense, not to sin at all, that is, not wilfully, sedately, and deliberately.

Another quality observable in children, which our Lord expected from his followers, was that temper which is opposite to ambition and to an excessive love of this world. The disciples of Christ, like the rest of the Jews, were persuaded that the kingdom of the Messiah was to be temporal. As Christ had chosen them, and admitted them to his service and conversation, they concluded that they should be advanced to the greatest honours in his kingdom. But they were many in number, and could not, as they well supposed, be all equal in dignity. This thought disturbed them: a desire of pre-eminence possessed their minds, and made them aspire to the best share
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of their Master's favour, and the most honourable employments under him: they were jealous of each other, and these jealousies sometimes burst out into contention and resentment. They came to Jesus, says St. Matthew, and asked him, Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? He knowing their thoughts, and the end for which they put this question to him, called a little child, and set him in the midst of them, and said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven. That is, Unless you preserve yourselves free from pride, and ambition, and thirst of superiority, you are not fit for my service. My service requires persons who think not highly of themselves, who are not contentious about dignity, who pursue not worldly honour and power, who seek not to set themselves above others, whose great care is, not how high a station they may acquire, but how they may fulfil the duties of the station in which God hath placed them. Of this disposition, childhood is a proper emblem. Children are strangers

to the desires of wealth and grandeur, and to the arts of acquiring and preserving them: this is a distemper not incident to youth, and seldom felt till the first season of life is past.

The kingdom of Christ was not like other kingdoms: no rewards were promised to his subjects, in this world, none upon which they could certainly depend, those excepted which flow from virtue and a good conscience. His Church was to be in a low and suffering state for a considerable time: none were fit to enter into it, who could not bear disgrace and poverty and sufferings. The highest places there were the most dangerous and laborious, and they who should be chief in that society, were to be the servants of all, to be an example of patience, of self-denial, of humility, of charity, to be entirely occupied in serving others, and not to be ministered unto, but to minister.

Again, In children is usually found an unaffected sincerity, an open simplicity of manners, free from guile and hypocrisy, a heart easily touched with compassion, a readiness to lay aside anger and resentment, and to be reconciled to those who have offended them, and that sort of charity which thinketh no evil of others, and is apt to judge too favourably
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rather than too severely. These are qualities which are not thought very useful, and are seldom entertained by those who would thrive in the world at any rate : but they are necessary for one who would make the precepts of the Gospel the rule of his life ; and we may justly suppose that our Lord intended to require them from his followers, when he exhorted them to imitate young children. They were to pray for their enemies, to forgive and pity them, to return good for evil, to instruct the ignorant, to bear with the weak, to distinguish themselves from all mankind by their condescension and charity, and openly to profess a persecuted religion. This could not be accomplished, unless they were renewed in their minds, and as it were born again, and free from envy, hatred, dissimulation, and self-interest.

Children are weak and defenceless ; they are also sensible of it, and in any danger fly to their friends, and place an intire confidence in them ; which affords us a lively image of the disposition which a Christian ought to entertain, and of that humility and trust in God, opposite to pride and self-conceit, which he ought to exercise. He will not have a vain opinion of his own abilities ; he will not trust
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in his own dexterity, prudence, and industry, as if by them he could provide for himself without the blessing of God; he will not depend upon his own virtue and goodness, as if he were worthy upon that account to receive rewards from God; he will not rely upon his own constancy and resolution, as if he could acquit himself well under any trials and temptations, without the aid of the holy Spirit.

Lastly, In children is commonly found docility, joined to a desire of knowledge: they are usually free from two bad qualities, which where they prevail keep the persons who are infected with them in ignorance; namely, pride and prejudice.

It is evident that grown persons are on many accounts more capable than children of receiving instruction, and of improving their minds; they have the advantage of experience, their memory and reasoning are strengthened by exercise; they are therefore better qualified to perceive the force of an argument, and the evidence of a truth which is explained to them. But if a conceit of their own abilities, with a contempt of those who reason with them, or a fondness for a contrary opinion, hath taken possession of their minds, they will

will be less able to discern right from wrong than a child; and the more ingenious and learned they are, the further will they be from forming a just judgment; for their abilities will only serve to furnish them with subtle cavils, and with objections to the truths which they are not willing to believe; and you may confute them, but not convince them. Young persons, if they have no bias, will much sooner perceive a truth which is set before them, and assent to it, than those of more years who are stubborn and vain, or prepossessed in favour of a contrary doctrine.

When our Lord said in the text, that they only should enter into his kingdom who were only like young children, amongst other amiable qualities discoverable in that age, he certainly intended to recommend to men a willingness and aptness to receive instruction, and a mind free from pride and prejudice. Indeed it seems very probable that he had this particularly in view, if we consider the opposition which he experienced in the discharge of his ministry.

It appears that the most considerable persons of his nation in learning, rank, and authority, were the great opposers of Christ. They had
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conceited notions of their national privileges, and wanted a triumphant Messias; they held many opinions, both speculative and practical, different from the doctrines taught by Christ; they pretended to great skill in religious learning; they admired their own penetration and wisdom; they supposed themselves fully qualified to teach others, and so accomplished as to need no instruction; they scorned to become disciples of Christ, and to converse with those poor and illiterate persons whom he had chosen for his companions; they were ambitious and vain-glorious, selfish and covetous; they observed the ritual law and had the outside of religion, and were full of spiritual pride and arrogant notions of their own sanctity. To such persons the Gospel was preached in vain, exhortations were lost upon them, reproofs exasperated them, and nothing less than a thorough change could qualify them to enter into the kingdom of heaven.

Our Lord, having in view these prejudices of the Jews, and the present and future effects of them, takes occasion to declare, that he required, as a previous condition, the disposition of children in those who would join themselves to him. He demanded a teachable and a tractable

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ble temper, and this temper is very different from credulity. To be credulous, is to believe without evidence, a thing which our Lord not only never required, but greatly disapproved. The first thing to be considered by an honest and prudent man was, whether Christ were a prophet and a messenger sent from God. Here Christ appealed to their reason and to their senses, whether he did not answer the character of the Messias as it stood in the prophetic writings; whether he did not go about doing good, and working miracles; and whether these were not sufficient proofs of his mission.

These things being clear, the consequence was clear, that men ought to hear him with attention and reverence, to think him wiser than themselves, not to give way to a contentious cavilling humour, but to believe his doctrines, unless he were to teach manifest immoralities, or palpable contradictions.

We are, I presume, free from this fault, of which we find so many of the Jews to have been guilty. We believe in Christ, we assent to his doctrines, we oppose not our judgment to his, we call not his wisdom and veracity in question. But let us not esteem ourselves

too much upon this account. Our case is different from the case of those to whom the Gospel was first preached. They were bred up in another persuasion, they had many prejudices to conquer, and often as many temporal advantages to resign, before they could be converted. We contend not with the same difficulties. We are Christians by education, and if we have prejudices, they are usually on the side of revelation. We have the more reason to remember that our belief is of no value, if it be not accompanied with an obedience to the precepts of Him, whom we call our Lord. If we perform not what we think and own to be his will, we shew that we are Christians by chance and custom, or rather that we have no title to that name, and therefore none to the rewards which are promised to those who embrace the Gospel with a careful endeavour to live suitably to its directions.

S E R M O N IX.

MATTH. v. 3, 4.

Blessed are the poor in spirit; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are they that mourn; for they shall be comforted, &c.

OUR Saviour thus begins and introduces his discourse upon the mount with several short sentences in praise of certain virtues and pious dispositions. I shall first endeavour to illustrate them in more or fewer words, according as they require, and then make some general remarks upon them.

I. Blessed are the poor in spirit; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

What we call a literal and a figurative way of speaking, is by Jewish writers called flesh and spirit. To be poor, according to the flesh, or in the literal sense, is to be destitute of the necessities of life. To be poor in spirit, or poor in a figurative sense, may perhaps mean, to be free

from an inordinate love, or vehement desire of riches, to be contented if we have them not, and patiently to bear even the lowest state of indigence; and if we have wealth, to value it no more than it deserves, that so we may be ready decently and cheerfully to resign up any part of it, or the whole, if he who gave it should require it.

To be poor in spirit means also in Jewish phrase, to be humble and lowly-minded; nor is this interpretation very remote from the former.

A wise indifference and a moderate affection towards the things of the present world, is represented by our Saviour as a blessed temper, and worthy of a future reward. Without such a disposition none could become his disciples, and embrace the low state to which he invited them; and therefore it is more than once required and recommended in this discourse upon the mount.

To those who are thus poor is promised the kingdom of God, an abundance of heavenly riches, such as an admission into the Church, remission of sins, the knowledge of divine truths, the wealth of a contented mind, the
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gifts of the holy Spirit, and eternal happiness hereafter.

Blessed are they that mourn; for they shall be comforted.

That is, say some, Blessed are they who are truly penitent, and mourn for their sins, for they shall be comforted with the assurance of pardon, and the hope of future happiness. This interpretation is not improbable: but as the words, they that mourn, are general, a wider sense also may be added to them: Blessed are they who endure afflictions of any kind with an humble submission to the divine Providence: but still more blessed, if their sorrows, and the hardships which they undergo, are for the sake of duty and religion. God will certainly support them under their distress, and hereafter they shall rest for ever in those mansions where no sorrow enters.

Blessed are the meek; for they shall inherit the earth.

Here our Saviour alludes to the words of David in the Psalms; Yet a little while, and the wicked shall not be, but the meek shall inherit the earth.—Wait on the Lord—and he shall exalt thee to inherit the earth:

Which promises relating plainly to a quiet possession of the land of Canaan, the words of our Lord also may bear a sense not different, and have some view even to temporal benefits. Blessed are they who are of a gentle, harmless, and patient temper, who are not haughty and turbulent, or eager of worldly honours, who can forgive injuries, and can give up part of their right for the sake of peace. They shall inherit the earth; they by the providence of God, and according to the common course of things, will probably find friends and protectors, escape injuries, and enjoy quietly their possessions, and the fruits of their honest industry. Though they lay not up for themselves great treasures, nor rise to high stations, but in these arts are much inferior to many of the crafty and enterprising children of this world, yet neither are they in equal danger of falling and of being stripped of all. No promise is here made to the meek, of wealth and power and worldly honours, nor indeed are these things their ordinary portion, but only of the necessities of life without strife, disquiet, or remorse. This will usually be the blessing bestowed upon them, and in case of persecution, if this reward should fail, it will be made up in
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the next state, in that new heaven and new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness.

Thus the temporal promises in the Scriptures of the Old Testament may be understood in a sublimer and spiritual manner, and it is suitable to the tenor of the Gospel so to interpret them, and to give this sense to our Saviour's promise.

These words, Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth, are taken, as we said before, from the Psalms, where they relate to a quiet possession of the land of Canaan; and we may farther observe, that after our Lord's death and resurrection, the unconverted Jews, by their seditious and wicked behaviour, ruined themselves and their country; but the Jews who were Christians, and of a quiet and peaceable disposition, escaped those evils, retired from Jerusalem, as Christ had warned them to do, before the siege; and after the city was destroyed, and the enemies were departed, returned and dwelt there in tranquillity. Then was the promise that the meek should inherit the earth, the land of Canaan, made good: and it is not improbable that our Lord might have this event also in his view, when he declared what great

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advantages meekness should find even in this world.

Blessed are they who do hunger and thirst after righteousness; for they shall be filled.

That is; Blessed are they who, having a true sense of their own defects and spiritual wants, and of the excellence of religion, desire above all things to be assisted and instructed in the performance of their duty, and to become eminent in piety; and who are as industrious and active in this wise pursuit, as men oppressed with hunger and thirst are glad to satisfy those natural appetites. So rational and so earnest a desire shall never be disappointed; they shall become righteous, and enjoy the present and the future rewards of righteousness.

Blessed are the merciful; for they shall obtain mercy.

They who shew humanity and charity upon all proper occasions, and can forgive injuries, may expect to find that favour and mercy from God which they shew to men. He will provide for them, and forgive them their trespasses. Though this be the sense of the words, They shall obtain mercy, yet there is no necessity absolutely to exclude another sense which may be joined to it, that they shall obtain mercy
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and forbearance and kindness from men, as well as from God; since this is, for the most part, the result and the recompense of such a behaviour.

Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.

They whose hearts are free from impurity, deceitfulness, and hypocrisy, and whose designs and desires are holy and upright, will entertain just notions of God and of religion, and a just persuasion that he approves and loves them, and enjoy his favourable influences; and hereafter they shall have a nearer access to his glorious presence, and that fulness of joy which shall attend it.

Blessed are the peace-makers; for they shall be called the children of God.

Sweet is the disposition, and happy is the occupation of those who desire the welfare of all men, who study to compose and allay contention and discord, to extinguish wrath, malice, bitter zeal, and persecution, and to promote universal peace, friendship, and forbearance. Such persons imitate the most amiable and glorious perfection of the divine nature, goodness and love; such God acknowledges for his children, and consequently they must be happy, happy

happy in being like God, who is called the God of peace, and happy in the peace of mind, serenity of conscience, and other rewards, which their heavenly Father will confer upon them.

Lastly; Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness sake; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Greater love can no man shew to God and to Christ, than to bear what is disagreeable and offensive to human nature, to lose what in itself is innocent and convenient, and to forego all the outward comforts of life, rather than offend him; to profess his faith and his hope with courage and constancy in the face of a wicked world, and not to be deterred by scorn, contempt, contumelies, wrongs, insults, injuries, losses, and persecutions, which his behaviour will draw upon him. Such a person is truly a servant of God, and a disciple of Christ, and will receive an ample and a distinguished reward in the kingdom of heaven.

II. I proceed to some general remarks upon the foregoing doctrines.

1. It was our Saviour's custom to raise matter of instruction and of moral reflection from the occasion, the place, the circumstances, or the

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the objects which presented themselves to him. This manner of discoursing was peculiar to him, and whosoever carefully peruses the Gospel will find perpetual instances of it.

He went up into a mountain, says St. Matthew, and recollecting that the law of Moses was given from mount Sinai, he likewise gave his new law from this mountain.

Recollecting that God had commanded the Israelites to pronounce in a solemn manner blessings on the righteous from mount Gerizim, and curses upon the wicked from mount Ebal, he also began his discourses with blessings on the good, to which, as we find in St. Luke, he afterwards added woes to the wicked.

Recollecting also that the book of Psalms, which was a kind of Manual of devotion for the Jews, began with blessings; Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly; he also ushered in his precepts with a blessing on such men.

2. If there be any part of the New Testament which deserves a more serious consideration than the rest, it must needs be our Saviour's discourse upon the mount, delivered in St. Matthew's Gospel, which contains the sum
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and substance of Christian religion. In it our Lord explains morality, condemns several Jewish opinions, commands some things which the Law of Moses did not require, and forbids some things which it permitted. He enables us to resolve a question which had exercised and embarrassed and divided the wise and the learned, namely, what is the *Chief Good* of man, and consequently what is the great end which man should always have in view? The chief good of man, as it may easily be collected from this discourse of our Lord, is eternal happiness in the life to come, and in this present life peace of mind, and the advantages flowing from it. Whatsoever therefore tends to this is good, and what may deprive us of it is evil. To make his hearers more attentive, Christ begins his discourse with some short and remarkable sentences, in commendation of certain neglected virtues, sentences which may be called *Christian Paradoxes*, in which he declares those persons most happy, who according to the estimation of the world are most miserable.

3. The rewards annexed here by our Saviour to several virtues, though variously expressed, mean the same thing, namely, present or future happiness, or both; but they are varied for the

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fake of elegance, and to raise the attention, and to fix themselves upon the mind of the hearer or reader; and therefore there is a likeness or an opposition between the thing recommended and the reward promised to it. There is a likeness between the duty and the recompense, as when to those who are of a quiet temper is promised the quiet possession of the necessities of life; to those who are merciful, mercy and pardon; to those who are pure and holy in heart, the knowledge of the pure and holy God, and the enjoyment of his favour and assistance; to those who promote peace and love amongst men, the approbation of the God of peace and love, and the honour of being his children. There is an opposition between them, as when to the poor in spirit are promised true and heavenly riches; to those who mourn, comfort and joy; to those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, spiritual food which shall fully satisfy them; to those who are reduced to the lowest state by the iniquity of men, and are deprived of all for the sake of religion, sceptres and crowns, and an everlasting kingdom.

4. It has been observed, that though our Saviour here annexes blessedness and eternal life to the practice of single virtues, yet we should

should understand these promises to be founded upon a supposition that such persons take care not to be deficient in the rest of their duty. To think otherways would be to fall into a gross mistake, a mistake which, as we are told, was often to be found amongst the Jews. Their teachers recommended the exact performance of some great commandment, as the means of being excused for transgressing other divine laws; and this great commandment, suitably to their trifling genius, was sometimes the law of the sabbath, or of sacrifices, or of tythes, some ritual institution. Into the same indiscretion, to say no worse of it, some Christians have fallen, when magnifying single Christian virtues, charity, for instance, as it means liberality, they have so spoken of alms-giving, as if by a constant practice of it men might compound with God for a constant neglect or an habitual violation of some other duties.

But the morality of our Saviour is not such. It is free, as from severe rigour, so from weak indulgence. The Gospel treats us as men, frail and fallible creatures. It does not suppose that we can arrive at sinless perfection, and it continually offers us pardon upon repentance and amendment; but it expects a

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sincere endeavour to fulfil all righteousness, allowing no habitual neglect or presumptuous contempt of any precept. Whosoever shall break the least of these moral commandments, and shall teach men to do so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven, he shall be no disciple of Christ.

And indeed the thing speaks itself; for since a promise of God's favour and future rewards is here made, not to the merciful only, but to the meek, to the pure in heart, to the peacemakers, to the poor in spirit, to the lovers of righteousness, we ought to be not only merciful, but meek, and pure in heart, and in word, desirous of excelling in every thing that our Saviour recommends. To this we may add, that several of these virtues are of so extensive a nature, that by easy consequence they may imply the whole of religion. Such are poverty in spirit, hungering and thirsting after righteousness, purity of heart, and a patient enduring of sufferings for the sake of Christ.

5. Our Saviour seems to have had it in his view to contradict the common notions of the Jews, especially of their rulers and teachers, of the Scribes and Pharisees and chief Priests, who at that time were corrupted to a great degree,

degree, both in speculation and in practice. To worldly-mindedness they were remarkably addicted; temporal recompenses they thought to be the chief motive to obedience; obedience they made to consist principally in the observance of ceremonial duties and traditionary precepts; poverty and contempt they esteemed the greatest of evils; purity they placed in bodily purifications; concerning purity of mind they had mean notions, imagining that they were not accountable to God for their evil thoughts and designs, unless they brake out into actions; to universal love and benevolence they were perfect strangers, and had a cordial hatred for all who differed from them in religion: a suffering and oppressed condition they detested as intolerable; a meek and a peaceable temper was scarcely to be found amongst them, but a turbulent spirit of faction and sedition prevailed, and at last completed their ruin, as it will produce the ruin of any other nation.

In opposition to the doctrines and practices of these loose moralists and false guides, our Lord insists upon moderate affections towards the things of this world, and a contempt of them when they interfere with religion, upon a patient expectation of a future and distant reward,

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upon purity of heart, upon an ardent love of piety and desire of excelling in it, upon a meek and peaceable, a charitable and benevolent temper, and recommends a low and suffering state humbly endured for righteousness sake.

6. Lastly ; let us observe that our Saviour not only contradicts the opinions of the Jews, but also several notions too common and prevalent amongst many of those who pretend to have his doctrine in high veneration. It seems to be a controversy between him and us wherein true happiness consists. He has here told us what sort of persons he accounts to be blessed : but it is to be feared that many Christians, though not in words, yet silently in the judgment of their hearts, and openly in their conduct, contradict his doctrine upon this point. In general they acknowledge the truth of all that he taught ; but by an illusion which is too common, they entertain sentiments not reconcileable with this acknowledgment. To see whether they do or no, let us once more consider in what our Lord places happiness, to what state of life, and to what disposition of mind he declares it to belong. Let us imagine to ourselves a Christian to whom all that he has said might be applied ; for such a person

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must in his account be eminently blessed. The Christian then who would exactly answer our Lord's description, desires above all things to excel in goodness; his mind is purified from irregular affections; the things of this world he values no farther than as they supply the wants of nature, or put it in his power to be serviceable to the needy and deserving; though he excuses no faults in himself, he excuses them in others, and is ready to forgive those who trespass against him; he loves his neighbour, that is every man, as himself; he is not exempted by divine providence from calamities; he is often exercised with afflictions, which he bears with exemplary patience and meek resignation; he lives in times of persecution, but he is not ashamed or afraid of making open profession of his faith, for which he is insulted, calumniated, scorned, and punished, and at last lays down his life for the sake of Christ.

Here is not only a good, but a happy man in the opinion of him who was best able to judge of goodness and of happiness; and the truth of this assertion must appear evident and undeniable, if we consider that the Almighty is able and willing to recompense a faithful servant ten-thousand-fold for any thing that he

shall do or suffer upon his account, and that such a person even at present, and in the worst situation, has many solid advantages and durable blessings ; he has the pleasing consciousness of adhering to virtue, the calm composure and serious pleasure that accompanies such a behaviour, the approbation of all judicious and religious persons, the satisfaction of setting a good example by which he may be useful to the world both living and dead, the favour of God, his assistance to support and strengthen him, and a reasonable hope of eternal peace and joy when his few days of trial are past, and the storm of adversity is over-blown.

And yet there are persons who, calling themselves Christians, and yielding an assent, that is, a superficial and confused kind of assent to the Gospel, believe not these things or act as if they believed them not. They cannot conceive how such a person can be happy : they would indeed honour and admire and praise him ; but upon no account, would they be placed in his condition. They would willingly be happy in both worlds, and as to the present, ease and pleasure is their principal care and concern. But they mistake the nature of happiness, and the way to it. Whosoever immoderately

derately loves the world and the things of the world, and hungers and thirsts after them, takes a sure method to be unhappy : the evils of life visit him, his wants increase upon him, his patience and resolution grow weak, he cannot bear a disappointment, every sorrow sits heavy upon his soul, every calamity wounds him deeply, and the fear of death taints all his pleasures.

We have seen who is the good and happy man in the estimation of our Lord. I shall not assert that it is our duty to wish that we were in all respects and circumstances like such a person. We are not commanded to desire and to pray for poverty, contempt, afflictions, and persecutions ; there are other ways to heaven besides martyrdom, and we know who it was that said, If it be possible, let this cup pass from me. But thus much is certain, that it is better to be amended by affliction, than by too much prosperity to grow regardless of our everlasting concerns ; it is better to suffer wrongs and injuries than to commit them ; it is better to be the lowest, the poorest, the most neglected and despised, than to have our hearts and our principles corrupted by wealth and power ; it is better to lose all for the
fake

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fake of Christ, than to be disowned by him at the day of judgment.

May the desires of our hearts correspond to these determinations of our reason; and if worldly happiness of any sort would prove our ruin, be it far from us, may we for ever be strangers to it!

of Christ. I mean to be satisfied by him in
 the day of judgment.
 I have the witness of my heart, and I feel
 that I am a child of God. I feel that I
 have been redeemed by his blood, and I
 feel that I am a new creature in Christ.
 I feel that I have been born again, and I
 feel that I have been given a new heart.
 I feel that I have been given a new mind,
 and I feel that I have been given a new
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S E R M O N X.

I T I M. iv. 8.

Godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.

THE words of the text are plain, and the meaning of them is apparently this, that piety is most advantageous, because God hath assured us, that they who serve him shall be rewarded for it both in this life and in the next. But this plain assertion seems, so far as it relates to the temporal rewards of piety, somewhat hard to be justified when compared either with fact and common experience, or with abundance of passages in Scripture. To shew the truth of it, we will first consider what God hath promised to piety in the present life, and secondly prove that his promises rightly understood are actually fulfilled.

I. Let us consider what God hath promised to piety in the present life.

St. Paul says in the text concerning godliness, that it has the promise of the life that now is, by which expression he refers either to the promises of temporal rewards, which are contained in the Old Testament, or to those which were afterwards made by our Saviour; he refers, I say, either to the one or to the other, but most probably to both.

If we consult the Old Testament, we find many assurances of worldly prosperity to the good, or, which is all one, affirmations that piety ever carries along with it a present reward. From these passages we may observe, that to the righteous a promise is made of success in their designs, of guidance and direction in their ways and undertakings, of supply in their wants and necessities, of protection in dangers, of support in afflictions, of deliverance from trouble, of peace and quiet, of joy and cheerfulness, of honour and reputation, of wealth and prosperity, and of a good name after death. It is reasonable to suppose, that St. Paul had these declarations in view, when he said that godliness has a promise of the life which now is, and that he thought not the promise so confined

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fin'd to the Jewish nation, as not to be extended in some measure to all good men in all times and places.

Let us now see what promises of this kind are contained in the Gospel.

Our Lord promises to his servants the necessities of life in these words: Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you. In his sermon upon the mount he says; Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth; the meaning of which seems to be, that they who are of a peaceable and quiet disposition shall enjoy what is needful with great tranquillity and contentedness. He says to his disciples; There is no man who hath left house or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands for my sake and the Gospel's, but he shall receive an hundred fold more now, in this time, houses and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life. That is; he who for my sake is persecuted and deprived of his possessions, is forsaken and hated by all his relations, shall have it abundantly made up to him; he shall find those Christians to whom he joins himself more affectionate,

fectionate, and more charitable than the friends would have been whom he has lost ; he shall be happier in the approbation of his own mind than he was before, and in the end shall obtain eternal life.

Our Lord proposes, as a reward, to his disciples, peace of mind, and joy and comfort through the influences of the Holy Ghost. Let not your heart be troubled. I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter ; that he may abide with you for ever. Peace I leave with you ; my peace I give unto you. Your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you. These promises belong to all Christians. It is said of the first believers, that they were filled with joy and gladness. St. Paul affirms, that this joy was not destroyed by any afflictions which they endured ; we are sorrowful, yet always rejoicing ; and he exhorts believers to rejoice evermore. The same Apostle says to the Ephesians ; Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honour thy father and mother, which is the first commandment with promise ; that it may be well with thee, and that thou mayest live long upon the earth. From which place it seems to appear, that he thought this promise to be extended

tended in some measure to all who would obey the precept, and proposed to converted Gentiles no less than to Jews; and it is observable that he gives the sense, but drops and alters the words of the commandment, which run thus—that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee, and relate only to the Jews; instead of which St. Paul says,—that thou mayest live long upon the earth.

St. Peter declares, that virtue will usually secure us from injuries, and that a pious and peaceable disposition produces temporal happiness. Who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good? He that will love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile. Let him eschew evil, and do good; let him seek peace and ensue it. For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers. Such are the promises in the holy Scriptures concerning the temporal rewards of godliness.

II. We are secondly to consider how these promises are made good to the righteous.

And here we are surrounded with objections which press upon us from all sides, objections from

from the present state of things, from the history of past ages, and from the Scriptures themselves.

The most careless observation will shew us much misery and trouble falling indifferently upon the good and bad, and from which the most religious life can give no security. We see some suffering hardships, because they are virtuous, and will not sacrifice their conscience to their present interest.

If we look back into the history of past ages, we find that it ever was so, and that the same complaints have been always made.

If we consult the opinion of grave and wise men, we find many of them in all times setting forth the evils of human life in strong terms, and declaring, that more trouble than satisfaction is to be expected in our passage through this world.

If we peruse the books of the Old Testament, we find there also the same observations, that man is born to trouble, that all is vanity, and that there is one event to the righteous and to the wicked.

If we examine the history of God's people, amongst those who have gone through affliction, we find patriarchs, as Abraham, exposed

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to ill usage, and wandering about without any settled home, and Jacob sadly and justly complaining that the days of his pilgrimage had been few and evil; we find prophets, as Moses, conducting a stubborn and ungrateful people: Elijah hiding himself in deserts, weary of his life, and requesting of God to let him die; Jeremiah overwhelmed with trouble, and cursing the hour in which he was born; we find virtuous kings, as Josiah, cut off in the flower of his age, and falling in battle, of whom it is said, that like unto him there was no king before him that turned to the Lord with all his heart, neither after him arose there any like him; we find good men delivered over to the malice of the ungodly, who had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, of bonds and imprisonment, who were stoned, were sawed asunder, were slain with the sword, who wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented, of whom the world was not worthy; who wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens, and in caves of the earth.

In the New Testament we have examples of oppressed and persecuted virtue in John the Baptist, in the disciples of our Lord, and in
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the first Christians. Our Saviour says to his followers; They shall deliver you up to the councils, and scourge you in their synagogues, and ye shall be brought before governors and kings, and ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake: yea the time shall come that whosoever killeth you shall think that he doth God service. How this prediction was fulfilled, we may learn from St. Paul. I think, says he, that God hath set forth us the Apostles last, as it were appointed to death: for we are made a spectacle unto the world, and to Angels, and to men. Even unto this present hour we both hunger and thirst, and are naked and are buffeted, and have no certain dwelling-place, and labour working with our hands: being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it; being defamed, we entreat; we are made as the filth of the world, and are the off-scouring of all things unto this day.

In the discourses of Christ and the writings of the Apostles we are told, that such is the lot of the servants of God, that the world will hate them, that they must expect to bear the cross, to pass through tribulation, and suffer persecution of one kind or other, if they will live a godly life.

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These things being so, what becomes of the promise that piety shall receive a present reward; and how shall we confirm the truth of it against such a cloud of witnesses, and so much stubborn matter of fact?

This is what we must now endeavour to do by setting it in a true light.

I. By these declarations in Scripture, that godliness has its reward in this life, is not meant that every good person shall enjoy perfect happiness here below; which is not only contrary to experience, but seems altogether impossible.

If a man were to give a loose to his imagination and desires, he might represent to himself many things in the possession of which he would find great satisfaction, but which he has no prospect, or a very uncertain prospect of obtaining. I speak not of the cravings of a disorderly and vitious appetite, but of those wishes which a virtuous man might own without shame.

Such a person would be glad to have his senses and his passions in perfect submission to his reason, that he might be ever ready to do what is right, and to avoid what is evil, without any uneasy struggles between duty and inclination; but man will never acquire this command over himself, whilst he is in a state

a state of trial, and surrounded with temptations.

He would be well pleased if he could enlarge the compass of his knowledge, and clear up many difficulties in natural and revealed religion which perplex him, and be able to form a just judgment upon points in which wise and good and learned and inquisitive men have differed very widely; but he finds this to surpass his abilities.

He would, if it were left to his choice, possess an uninterrupted state of health; for no one can take delight in sickness and pain: but this is not to be expected whilst the soul dwells in a body tending of itself to decay and dissolution, and exposed to so many evils from without.

He would cheerfully accept the nature and the perfections of an Angel, could be willing to be changed from mortal to immortal, and, like those few recorded in Scripture, ascend up to heaven, and not leave his body in the grave; for though necessity may teach a wise man to submit decently to death, though religion may enable him to undergo it with a greater degree of resignation and constancy, yet human nature would shun it, and must entertain some dislike of it.

Again:

Again: Though his desires be moderate, and he sets no value upon those superfluities in which many place their chief happiness, he would prefer a state of independence and a possession of the necessaries of life to extreme poverty; and yet it is possible that the latter may be his portion.

He is taught to pray that God's kingdom may come, and that his will may be done on earth as it is in heaven; he would rejoice to see virtue and religion prevail every-where, and flourish more and more; but he may see much impiety, and immorality, and cold indifference, and fierce contention, and zeal for trifles, and error, and ignorance; and this may raise in him an indignation and a compassion which are not consistent with true happiness.

Lastly, It must be his earnest desire that his friends, his relations, his family, may escape the great corruption which is in the world, and spend their days wisely and religiously; but this most commendable desire may be disappointed, and his daily endeavours to accomplish it may prove unsuccessful. This of all the calamities to which the good are exposed seems without exception to be the most grievous; and yet it is a calamity from which the

most consummate piety cannot always protect us.

Hence it appears that complete happiness is not to be obtained in this life, and therefore when we speak of the temporal reward of righteousness, we must not suppose it to comprehend every thing which reason would represent to be good and desirable, and which might be innocently pursued and possessed. We must reckon that person sufficiently happy who passes his days with tolerable ease and satisfaction.

2. Temporal rewards are promised to piety: and if all those who call themselves Christians were influenced by these and other proper motives to live suitably to the religion which they profess, it would manifestly appear that godliness is profitable unto all things; if any nation would be eminently virtuous, it would be distinguished from others by many temporal advantages; if any society entertained just and honourable notions of God, if they loved their neighbours as themselves, if they were sober, temperate, frugal, and industrious, if they were honest without compulsion, through principles of honour and virtue, if they preferred a good name to pleasures, riches, or power,

power, and the public interest to their private profit, if they would think and act thus, they would escape more than half the evils which plague mankind.

It has been pretended that private vices are beneficial to society; but the history of the world contradicts this weak and wicked notion, and assures us, that all commonwealths have for the most part been prosperous proportionably to their national virtues; and that the Jews in particular, when they observed the laws of God, and were ruled by pious governors, subdued their enemies, and enjoyed an affluence of all good things.

But though much of the benefit which might be reaped from piety is lost to the world by the perverseness of the wicked, and though the righteous, by dwelling with them, are often sufferers upon their account; yet the promises made to godliness are personal, and therefore we may in the most disorderly state of things expect advantages from it, of which none shall be able to deprive us: for,

3. Virtue has a natural tendency to promote happiness, and to remove from us many evils. A good life produces the testimony of a good conscience, hope of a future reward, cheerfulness,

fulness, resignation to God's will, reliance upon his providence, patience under adverse circumstances, and a power of regulating the passions.

A just, generous, humble, and charitable behaviour usually produces returns of civility and of good offices, secures from enemies, or wins them over, or makes their malice ineffectual and contemptible, raises up faithful friends, establishes a firm and lasting reputation, commands respect and esteem, and makes men prosper in their callings.

Temperance and industry commonly preserve health of body and of mind, enable us to procure, to keep, to enjoy what is necessary, and to despise what is superfluous.

As these are the natural fruits of goodness, it may very well be said in Scripture, that it has a reward here, because it often produces these effects, and will always produce them, unless violently disturbed and hindered by other causes interposing.

We may as truly assert in general that piety produces happiness, as we affirm that seed sown in good ground brings forth fruit in due time, though blasts and intemperate seasons and other accidents may destroy it. In like manner

manner godliness is profitable unto all things; and yet the temperate may be afflicted with diseases, the virtuous may be injured and persecuted by the wicked, by those whom they never offended, they may be forsaken and unkindly used by those whom they have obliged, they may be exposed to slander and calumny, public calamities may befall the nation to which they belong, and they may be involved in those general evils; good men, who have been guilty of some great offences, may suffer as long as they live, and bear the bad effects of their former transgressions, which was the case of David; and many troubles may fall indifferently upon the righteous and wicked.

4. The promises made to godliness in the New Testament are for the most part duly fulfilled.

As to the future rewards of righteousness, they were certainly the hope and expectation of all good men in all ages of the world. But in the Gospel, where life and immortality are more clearly revealed than in the Old Testament, fewer temporal blessings are set before us as motives to obedience.

Long life is not absolutely promised us, because we are taught, that not how long we live,

but how well we live, ought to be our chief care; that a life cannot be too short which is spent in a regular obedience to God, nor a death untimely which conducts to perpetual happiness.

Riches are not promised to us, because we are taught that the life of man consists not in the abundance of the things which he possesses, and that food and raiment and a contented mind is great wealth.

An exemption from common calamities is not promised to us, because we are taught that afflictions are often divine favours, very useful to us, and means to make us better and wiser.

The promises given to us are peace of mind and joy in the Holy Ghost, with a supply of the things absolutely needful for our subsistence. True it is that all who call themselves Christians possess them not; but the question is, whether the fault be not in them, and whether by their imprudent conduct, and by many defects, they deprive not themselves of God's favour and support. These promises are made to those who are truly religious, and if a person be such, his conscience will speak peace to him at all times, and his hopes and expectation of future happiness will enable him to bear with
courage

courage and constancy inconveniences and disappointments under which a worldly and vicious mind would sink and despond. It is possible indeed that he may be deprived even of necessities, if he lives in times of great distress or of persecution ; else it is very uncommon to find one, who through the course of his life has been pious, sober, just, merciful, civil, and industrious, so disappointed in all his undertakings, and so neglected by the world, as to want bread.

5. It is certainly more advantageous to be virtuous than to be wicked, even in this life, and in that sense godliness has its reward here.

Virtue is apt to produce and to secure to us all the happiness which we can reasonably expect in a state of trial ; vice in its own nature tends to make our condition worse than it would else be ; and so far the advantage is on the side of virtue.

Goodness, being joined to the favour of God, carries with it the hope of eternal life, which is a cheerful thing ; vice begets the dread of punishment, unless it be constantly attended with unbelief, and with a stupid carelessness about futurity,

futurity, which is not so common ; and here also the advantage is on the side of religion.

The ordinary calamities and troubles waiting on mortality fall upon the good and the bad : but the good bear them best, and feel them least. The wicked have nothing to comfort and sustain them in those evil days. If their conscience be then awakened, and the terrors of God set themselves in array against them, the expectation of something worse torments them more than their present sufferings, which they know to be only the beginning of sorrows. Or if they are completely and consistently wicked, and persuaded that there is no future state and no God, they have not any remedy to apply to their pain, except these maxims, that what cannot be avoided should be taken patiently, and that the more quietly it is endured, the less grievous is the sense of it ; which are indeed truths, but truths affording small comfort to a miserable being.

6. Lastly, we may observe, that there is more contentment and happiness amongst the good than we usually imagine.

This world is a place where innumerable evils abound, of which every one must expect

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to receive his share and bear his burden. It was not designed for our home, nor has it accommodations with which an immortal mind can rest thoroughly satisfied. All this is true; but it is true also that there is much good mixed with this evil, and that it is the temper more than the outward circumstances which makes us pass our days agreeably or disagreeably. There are therefore persons of all ranks, who upon the whole may be said to be tolerably happy. There are some in eminent stations, who, obedient to God and useful to mankind, have as much temporal prosperity as any wise and good man would wish, and there are more who living in silence, and escaping public observation, enjoy a calm rarely to be found in an higher condition. Such there are now without question, and such there have been in all past ages, whose lives are not recorded in history, which is usually the register of the vices and follies and calamities of mankind; men who in an innocent sense deceived the world, who quietly spent their days in the service of Virtue, and received from her rewards which are neither felt nor understood by the wicked.

Thus

Thus it appears to be, with proper restrictions and limitations, a true saying, that godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life which now is, and of that which is to come.

SERMON

S E R M O N XI.

EPHES. iv. 29.

Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good, to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace to the hearers.

A Rule is here given for our conversation, which consists of two parts; of a prohibition, and of a command. Nothing must proceed out of our mouths that is immoral; here is the prohibition: on the contrary, our discourse ought to be sober, virtuous, and tending to promote piety in those with whom we converse; here is the command.

Common sense will teach us to interpret the prohibition strictly, and the direction with a reasonable latitude. No excuse can be made for corrupt communication, for vicious discourse, and no circumstances can render it tolerable. But discourse which is good, which edifies,
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which tends to improve the hearers both in knowledge and in piety, cannot be the only and the constant employment of the tongue ; and therefore he who often and upon all proper occasions useth such discourse, may be supposed to observe all that is intended by the Apostle.

There have been interpreters who, in explaining the passages of Scripture relating to the government of the tongue, are too rigid and scrupulous. It is by no means a judicious and profitable way of expounding and enforcing such precepts, to carry them to the utmost strictness that the words will admit. Exhortations of this kind will probably lose their effect, and be received as the declamatory rhetoric of teachers who neither perform nor even believe what they say.

Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth ; but that which is good.

This text and the common practice of the world are so far at variance, that there is need of circumspection and discretion to treat the subject in such a manner as neither to require too much nor too little ; neither to make the precept appear impracticable by morose interpretations, nor to explain it away by large concessions.

cessions. Let us try whether we can avoid the one and the other extreme; remembering this, that when there is any competition between duty and custom, fashion must give place to reason, and not reason to fashion.

The abuses of speech, and the faults committed in conversation, are numerous. We will take notice of those which are the most striking and considerable, and conclude with some general remarks upon the subject.

I. Our discourse ought at all times to be free from profaneness, from speaking contemptuously of God and religion, from ridiculing things serious and sacred, from excusing, praising and encouraging vice and immorality.

As this is a crime of which no one can be guilty, who hath the least remains of honesty and goodness, it seems not necessary to say much about it to a Christian audience. Such persons should consider (but consideration dwelleth not with them) that if they believe a Deity and a providence, they are guilty of one of the most heinous crimes and egregious follies that can be imagined; and if they be Atheists, even atheism, though it were true doctrine, would not justify such licentious discourse, because it is an insult upon mankind, and very pernicious
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to the worldly interests of civil society. They must expect at least to be despised and abhorred by all sober and virtuous persons, and indeed by all well-bred and civilized persons. If these motives will not weigh with them, they must be left as incurables. I fear not God, nor regard man, says the unjust Judge in the Gospel. These indeed are two bad qualities which usually go together.

2. Another fault from which our conversation ought to be free, is immodest language. Let no corrupt communication proceed from you. The word *corrupt* relates chiefly and more particularly to lewd and immodest discourse, concerning which St. Paul says in another place, Let it not be named. This suggests a caution, that decent expressions be used even in the censuring of it. Many writers, not only Pagan but Christian, have reprov'd lewdness in a way that deserved reproof itself, and was not to be excused by the frivolous pretence of a good intention. If such a thing could be supposed, if there was in it an honest design, there was also a wretched want of discretion. I shall therefore only observe concerning this fault, that in common estimation it passeth for ill manners, and that in Scripture it is constantly represented

as a crime to which whosoever addicts himself is a reprobate, and hath no inheritance in the kingdom of God.

“ Approaches to indecent discourse are dangerous (says Epictetus). Whenever therefore any thing of this sort happens, if there be a proper opportunity, rebuke him who makes advances that way: or at least, by silence, and blushing, and a forbidding look, shew yourself to be displeased at such talk *.”

This censure of † *filthy communication* is the more remarkable, as coming from a Stoic Philosopher; since the men of that sect scrupled not to use broad language, and to call things by their names.

3. In conversation, swearing is to be avoided, under which may be included curses and imprecations on ourselves and others. There is no occasion to use many words to shew the folly and heinousness of this offence: everyone knows that our Lord hath in a most solemn and positive manner forbidden it, that there is neither pleasure nor profit in it; and that the best apology a man can offer for it is, that he is be-

* Enchir. 55. See Cicero, Epist. ad Famil. ix. 22.

† Αἰσχρολογία.

trayed into it by passion; which is only to make one fault an excuse for another.

4. In our conversation, lying is to be avoided, that is, an endeavour to deceive others, by making them believe that to be true, which we know or think to be false. This is allowed to be, generally speaking, mean and base, and a scandalous abuse of speech, and is strictly forbidden in Scripture; and yet it is a fault more common than those which we have mentioned. There are indeed many temptations to it, and there are few sins which will not directly lead us into it; for when a man hath said or done what he is afraid or ashamed to own, the next thing is, to deny it. He therefore who preserves a strict regard to truth must be a person of strict probity; and the Gospel, when it condemns lying, requires of consequence an upright behaviour, and a conscience void of offence.

I have considered lying, in the common acceptation of the word, that sort of lying which is generally condemned, without examining how far it may be lawful by words or actions to deceive others, for their own good, on certain occasions which are not frequent. This would lead us too far from our present subject.

5. Our

5. Our speech ought also to be free from railing and abusive language. The Scriptures allow no excuse for it, and deem no provocation sufficient to extort it from us. If any thing could justify us, it must be that we have been reviled first, and only repay the aggressors with the same language. But we are taught that we must not return railing for railing, but contrariwise blessing; and that whosoever, without cause, shall say to his brother, * Thou fool, that is, thou art a profane, a wicked, and an accursed wretch, shall be in danger of hell-fire. The meaning is, that we are accountable to God for our words, and that all reviling language, proceeding from habits of censoriousness, rash judgment, wrath, hatred, malice, and envy, shall, unless repentance prevents it, receive proper punishment hereafter. We are not to suppose that every hasty and indiscreet word shall consign a man over to eternal destruction, for then none could be saved, or that upon proper occasions we may not rebuke the guilty, to make them sensible of their folly, or that we may not pass a judgment upon actions

* Matth. v. 22. *Moreh*. The word should have been kept in the translation, like the word *Raca*, both being Hebrew words. See *Deuter*. xxi. 20.

notoriously wicked, and give to crimes the names which belong to them. It is the temper of mind, and the end which we propose to ourselves, that usually make our censures and reproofs sinful, or commendable, or harmless.

6. Our conversation should be free from slander and defamation. Evil-speaking is a copious subject, and requires a discourse to itself. I shall only observe concerning it, at present, that it is very mean, weak, and wicked, directly opposite to Christian charity, hurtful often to our neighbour, and always to ourselves, proceeding from many bad causes, and producing as many bad effects. We should therefore banish it from our conversation, abstaining from it ourselves, and, as much as lies in our power, discouraging it in our neighbour.

7. Another defect in conversation consists in a compliance with the faults of others. Our companions offend in their discourse against God and religion, against justice, and charity, and modesty; and we approve their discourses, we are pleased with them, at least we seem not displeased. Sometimes it is a corrupted heart which is the cause of this complaisance, and then we are as bad as those whose impiety diverts us; and sometimes it is only a blameable
bashfulness

bashfulness and diffimulation, which is a fault, though of a lesser kind. It is perhaps difficult to know at all times how we should behave ourselves towards such persons; but thus much seems to be required of us.

If we have any authority over them, any weight with them, or any probable hopes of reclaiming them, we should make use of reproof, admonition, and advice.

We cannot do them a better office, and it is not unlikely that they may in time to come acknowledge it to have been an act of kindness, though for the present it should displease. Frequent experience confirms what Solomon says upon this occasion; He that rebuketh a man, shall afterwards find more favour than he who flattereth with the tongue.

If such freedom should not become us, or if no good effect can be expected from it, we may, by turning off the discourse to other things, or by our silence, testify our dissatisfaction.

It is certainly fit that we shun, as much as we possibly can, the company of this sort of persons, from whom we must hear things offensive to a Christian, and even to an honest Pagan.

These rules we should think very reasonable, and these rules we should in all probability be disposed to follow, if any one in our hearing reviled our particular friends. We should either defend their character against his censures, or some way or other shew our dislike of his discourse; and if he persisted in such a disobliging behaviour, we should for the time to come avoid his conversation. Surely therefore God, and religion, and justice, and charity, and decency, ought to be as dear to us as any of our friends.

8. Another defect in conversation is, to confine it to discourses which are vain, trifling, and altogether unprofitable; in opposition to which, the Scripture in many places, the text in particular, recommends speech which affords rational entertainment, or good instruction.

Let us consider then what are the proper subjects of our discourse.

First, * there are many subjects which relate not directly to virtue and piety, and yet

* In primisque provideat, ne sermo vitium aliquod indicet inesse in moribus.—

Haebentur autem plerumque sermones, aut de domesticis negotiis, aut de republica, aut de artium studiis atque doctrina. Danda igitur opera est, ut etiamsi aberrare ad aliena cœperit, ad hæc revocetur oratio.—*Cicero De Offic. i. 36.*

deserve

deserve not to be called trifles, subjects taken from our own affairs, from the common occurrences of life, from the various studies and employments which make the honest and innocent occupations of men. These may furnish abundant matter for inoffensive and profitable discourse, and these seem to be usually the most proper subjects for public and mixed conversation.

Secondly, there is moral and religious discourse, which certainly agrees with the spirit of Christianity, but which the world generally dislikes and avoids as dull and unfashionable. It would be an excess of rigour to say that we are bound to confine our discourses always, or for the most part, to sacred subjects. Sometimes they may be unseasonable and unprofitable. Whilst we live in the world, we must converse with the world; and if so, we must comply with its ways, as far as they are innocent; we must suit our discourse to our company, and behave like them upon all proper and lawful occasions; which if we refuse to do, they will despise us as ill-bred, or suspect us as hypocrites and fanatics.

But there is another extreme, and that is, to avoid constantly and scrupulously the mention

of any thing that relates to virtue and goodness, as if we were ashamed of Christianity, to be uneasy when we hear it, and to discourage it upon all occasions.

Though we may for several reasons be sparing of such discourse in common conversation, yet with those whom it is our duty to instruct, it ought not to be omitted. Hear what God says to his people by Moses, after he had given them the Law; "These words which I command thee this day shall be in thy heart; and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thy house, and when thou walkest in the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up." Christians may judge whether less than this can be required of them.

St. Paul says, Let your communication be good, to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace to the hearers; and the same direction is repeated in other places. Now though this precept ought not to be extended to all, nor perhaps to most of the words which we utter, yet certainly it enjoins more than several persons imagine or perform. If, as our Lord observes, out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh, it must be said, though to
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some it may seem an hard sentence, that he, out of whose mouth virtuous and religious sentiments never proceed, hath an heart void of all good qualities. He who loves his God and his duty will even undesignedly shew some marks of it in his discourse, whatsoever be the subject of conversation; for true love will not be smothered and concealed; and if he hath discretion and good sense along with his piety, he will shew his zeal in such an easy, decent, and civil manner, as never to tire and disgust his company, unless his company be such as he would choose to avoid.

9. Another fault from which our speech ought to be free, is ill-nature and pride, and that arrogance, positiveness, vain boasting, and rude contradiction, which flow from these bad dispositions. They prevent the benefit and instruction which we might receive from others, and render us useless to them; shew us to be blind to our own defects, and make us generally disliked or hated. There are indeed few faults more prejudicial to our interest and reputation, and which the world is less disposed to excuse. This common aversion from those who are thus disobliging ariseth perhaps not so often from good principles as from pride, which

makes us impatient of contempt. Thus pride taught men, when they conversed together, to conceal the opinion which each had of his own superiority, and so contributed to establish civility.

But the most laudable and the most certain method of avoiding in our discourse every thing that hath the appearance of insolence and conceit, is to root it out of our minds, and when that is done, our speech will of course be free from it. That we may effect this, we should learn to know ourselves, to know our imperfections, some of which are common to us all as we are men, and some of which arise from our own negligence, indiscretion, and corruption. Whosoever is no stranger to his own heart and to his own understanding, must perceive that he is ignorant of many important truths, some of which he is able, and some of which he is unable to discover; that no small part of his knowledge is of small use to himself or to others; that his goodness is still more deficient than his abilities; that he omits many things which he ought to do, and doth many things which he ought to avoid. These reflections will shew us the beauty and the decency

of a humble and modest behaviour, and of a
modest

of humility, and the folly of overvaluing ourselves, and despising others.

10. Another fault in conversation is garrulity, or that talkative humour which engrosses all the discourse to itself. I choose rather to call this a folly, than to give it an harder name. But a folly it is, and no small impertinence, to take hold of the ears and attention of others, without returning them the civility of listening to what they have to propose.

If we trace this silly behaviour up to its source, we shall find that it ariseth, not from pride, but from vanity; for Pride and Vanity, in some respects, are different. By Vanity I mean Vain-glory. Now pride is often fullen and silent; vanity usually sets the tongue running faster than is decent. Pride is ill-natured; vanity is rather good-humoured. Pride despises others; vanity courts their applause, and is desirous of obtaining their favour. Thus vanity hath one advantage over pride, of being the less offensive of the two. We despise vanity, but we hate pride.

11. Another fault to be shunned is flattery, a fault by which we abase ourselves, and do hurt to those whose conceit and self-love we soothe and increase. If to call a man a fool is a rude

rude and a bad thing, it is worse to contribute all we can towards making him one. To commend others, especially young persons and our inferiors, in some cases is proper. In general, that we may so express our approbation, as not to fall into flattery, we should take care, Not to say more in praise of another than we believe to be true; and not to do it with selfish views.

12. Another fault, in some respects like that before mentioned, is a perfidious insincerity, making great professions of esteem and friendship to persons whom we value not, and never intend to serve. They who are guilty of this dissimulating craft may call it by what fine names they think fit; but Reason, which will not be so imposed upon, accounts it not only no better, but worse than ordinary lying. For in reality he who lies, only that he may excuse or hide a fault, and screen himself from disgrace and punishment, is not so blameable as he who imposes upon the credulous, makes them expect much kindness from him; and when the time comes that he should fulfil his word, knows not the name or the face of him whose affectionate friend he pretended to be: and if reminded of

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his promise, grows angry, and hates the person whom he hath disappointed.

More might be added here by way of advice to all those whom it may concern ; first, to be reserved and cautious of proffering their service beforehand, and ready to afford it in time of need ; to promise little, and to perform much ; to be discreet and careful in the choice of those on whom they intend to confer their favours ; never * to be ashamed of refusing what they will not grant, which is a foolish bashfulness ; but to account it truly base and shameful to raise and then to delude the hopes and expectation of others : And, secondly, to entertain that prudent distrust of mankind which puts neither an high value nor a rash confidence on commendation and applause, on fair words and a courteous behaviour, on professions of respect, esteem, and kindness ; to remember that there is a wide difference between complaisance and undissembled, disinterested affection, between civility and friendship ; that the heart and the mouth are a great way asunder, that favour is fickle, and that sincerity itself is not always accompanied with constancy.

* See Ter. *Andr.* iv. 1. Plaut. *Epid.* ii. 1. *Trinum.* ii. 4.

13. Lastly, there is a thing called banter and ridicule, which enters much into some conversations, and which whosoever shall condemn, runs the risk of provoking a malicious sort of people. But they and their malice are both to be despised; and he is a fool, and worse than a fool, who had rather make an enemy than lose a jest, who takes a pleasure in putting others out of countenance, and in giving them uneasiness, or in exposing those who are absent for the diversion of those who are present. St. Paul, amongst other indecencies of speech, hath mentioned *jesting*. We shall misunderstand him, if we imagine that he intended to condemn sprightly and ingenious discourse. But in his time, and in places where wealth and luxury abounded, jesting was a sort of profession or trade, and a very mean one, practised for the sake of a good meal by buffoons and parasites, by men who never opened their mouths but at another man's cost; and this sordid and licentious scurrility is, according to the Apostle, beneath the dignity of a worthy man. So says St. Paul; and any wise Pagan would have said the same.

We will now conclude with some general remarks on the subject.

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If any one should think the above-mentioned rules and restrictions rigid and severe, let him consider that most of them, as could easily be proved, have been recommended and required by Gentile writers. To apply therefore the words of our Lord; If our righteousness equals not the righteousness of the Greeks and Romans, in vain is the Gospel revealed to us, and better had it been for us never to have heard of it.

Since conversation takes up a considerable part of our time, some hours at least of life might be spent in reflecting upon the duties which we ought to perform, and the faults which we ought to avoid, if we would speak as becometh those who profess themselves the servants of Christ. And it is the more necessary that we should think of these things, because our speech is of great consequence to ourselves and to society.

By conversation we may give and receive innocent entertainment, and useful instruction, and promote the temporal and eternal interest of ourselves and others.

By conversation we may waste our time in trifles and impertinence, we may injure the

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reputation, and destroy the peace of our neighbour, we may learn and teach vice, and contract an indifference or hatred for every thing that is commendable.

Therefore are we exhorted in the Scriptures to be very careful of our discourse, and to avoid all corrupt communication.

Men are too much inclined to imagine themselves accountable to God for their actions only. Evil thoughts and evil words seem to them things of no consequence, and slight defects. Our Lord hath warned us to avoid this dangerous error. Concerning our thoughts, he hath told us, that we may be guilty in the sight of God of any crime, by intending and desiring to commit it; and concerning our words, he hath declared, that we shall give account of them at the last day.

To speak upon all occasions as much as becomes us, and no more than becomes us, must be acknowledged as difficult as it is comely. It is a perfection which probably we shall never attain; for, as the Author of Ecclesiasticus says, Who is he that hath not offended with his tongue? But we should endeavour to attain it, and to approach as near to it as human infirmity will allow.

We

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We should therefore carefully watch over ourselves, and observe what faults we are most inclined to commit in conversation, that we may avoid them for the future.

We should not be over-hasty in our speech, Such inadvertence and indiscretion ends in mischief, and in fruitless regret, which is a fool's repentance.

We should not be too profuse of our speech. It is almost impossible to use a multitude of words without using some that are blameable.

We should cultivate our understanding and acquire useful knowledge, that we may be furnished with materials for conversation. Much folly and impertinence, much slander and defamation arise from mere ignorance, mere barren poverty of thought ; and many persons fall into these faults, not so much perhaps from an ill-natured and malicious disposition, as because they have nothing else to say.

We should not throw ourselves heedlessly into all sorts of company ; we should not contract unprofitable acquaintances ; above all, we should avoid the society of wicked persons. There is no advantage which we can hope to receive from them, that can compensate the danger to which we are exposed by living familiarly with

with them, and within the contagion of bad example.

Lastly, we should converse with those who may make us wiser and better. If we can find persons, who to other good qualities have joined sincerity, and who if we do amiss will remind us of it, we should use our utmost endeavour to secure their friendship, and deserve their esteem.

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S E R M O N XII.

MATTH. xiii. 13.

Therefore speak I to them in parables, because they seeing see not, and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand.

THESE words of our Lord seem to contain some difficulty, and not to be altogether consistent with his wisdom and with his goodness, and with the design for which he came into the world. He came to teach men their duty, and to preach the Gospel to the poor and illiterate; and yet, as we are told here, he spake to them in parables, and his discourse was too obscure or too sublime for their capacities; and when his disciples ask him why he chose to address himself in such a manner to the people, he seems to answer that he did not intend to be understood by them.

VOL. II.

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To remove this difficulty, I shall lay together several observations concerning this way of teaching in parables used by our Saviour, which when considered and compared will tend to discover his designs, and to shew that he did nothing in all this which was not consistent with his intention and desire of enlightening the minds and reforming the manners of the people.

A parable is a story, either true or feigned, which when it is applied to certain cases or persons, is found to contain useful advice and instruction. So that a parable consists of two parts, of a fable or story, and of a moral or an application of the story.

It is to be observed that in many of our Saviour's parables no moral or application is made. So in the chapter whence the text is taken, he told the multitudes the parable of the sower and of the seed, some of which fell by the way-side, some upon stony ground, some amongst thorns, and some in good ground. But he explained it not to them, he left them to find out the meaning of it, if they could; though afterwards he interpreted it to his disciples.

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It is also to be observed that as in his public discourses he often inserted parables, so he likewise made transitions to other things, raised instruction from the objects at hand, told his hearers what faults they should avoid, exhorted them to repentance, piety, and charity, and gave them the rules for a good life and the great precepts of morality, in a way sufficiently familiar, and suited to their apprehensions.

Add to this, that several of his parables did not contain such doctrines as were necessary to be at that time understood by the people, but related to the future state of the Church, to the calling of the Gentiles, to the rejection of the Jews, to the death of the Messias, and to other points which were not at that time to be clearly made known.

I shall now lay together some reasons for which our Lord made use of parables in his discourses.

Parables are upon many accounts so convenient a way of setting good and bad actions in a proper light, of exhorting and dissuading, of praising and reprov'ing, that hardly any people have been quite strangers to them. Greek and Roman authors have used them sometimes;

Eastern nations frequently ; the writings of the Jews have been observed to abound with them, and in the Old Testament we find them spoken by prophets and princes, and other persons of distinction. Our Lord therefore might make choice of parables to conform himself to the taste and genius of the age and country in which he lived.

His design also in so doing certainly was to gain the attention of his hearers, and to make a deeper impression upon their minds. Instruction conveyed in this manner will insinuate itself, and produce a good effect, when other methods of teaching would prove unsuccessful. Rules of action, delivered by history and examples are received with more pleasure, and retained with more ease, than when they are inculcated by plain and direct precepts, which comparatively are somewhat dry and lifeless. By a parable a wise Roman pacified the people and quieted a sedition. By a parable the prophet Nathan engaged the attention of David, and raised in him the passions of pity and indignation ; and then by the application, Thou art the man, made him sensible of the greatness of his crime, and humbly patient under severe reproof. St. Luke, who, setting
aside

aside his sacred character, may justly claim a place amongst good writers, seems to have been particularly affected and pleased with the parables of Christ, and has recorded some which the other Evangelists have omitted, and amongst them the parable of the good Samaritan, of the Prodigal Son, of the unjust Steward, of the Rich man and Lazarus, of the Pharisee and Publican.

Our Lord spake some parables to the Jews relating to future things, which they could not perfectly understand at the time when they heard them, and which the event was to explain. Now though such parables might afford no immediate instruction to the hearers, yet in process of time they appeared to be very instructive and useful, because they were not only parables but prophecies, which when they were fulfilled afforded a convincing proof that their author was a person sent from God.

Our Lord was obscure in some of his parables, because he would not offend his hearers too much, by telling them, plainly and without disguise, truths which they could not then bear and receive, truths which in all probability would rather increase than remove their prejudices.

An ancient writer of fables tells us, that the danger of censuring powerful vice, and of uttering displeasing truths, gave rise to fables and parables, by which instruction and correction might be conveyed indirectly and safely.

These observations will help us to explain the words of the text.

A multitude being gathered together, our Lord spake many things to them, but all in parables. Upon which the Disciples, wondering that he should discourse so obscurely to the people, ask him the reason of it. He answered them; Because it is given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given. That is; What I have said in parables relates to the sublimer truths of the Gospel, and to the admirable dispensations of God. To you I will explain these things, because you are my disciples, you are faithful to me, in you I perceive good dispositions, a teachable temper, and a love of truth. But the multitudes are not fit to have such doctrines delivered to them. For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance; but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even what he hath.

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That is ; It is a common saying, He who is rich shall be richer, and he who is poor shall be poorer. This saying may be properly applied to spiritual things. He who diligently labours to acquire religious wisdom, and to conform his inclinations to his duty, will assuredly receive improvement by the due exercise of his faculties, and shall be favoured with additional helps from God. But he who is neither desirous of farther instruction, nor careful to live suitably to that little knowledge which he could not shut out of his mind, and which in a manner had been forced upon him, will be forsaken of God, and will daily grow worse.

Therefore speak I to them in parables, because they seeing see not, and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand. That is ; a great part of my audience is composed of persons who shut their eyes against the light, and neglect or abuse the means of knowledge, which have been hitherto in their power ; and therefore I speak to them obscurely.

And now I propose to shew that our Lord's behaviour towards the multitude can be charged neither with want of prudence, nor with want of goodness, by proving,

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First,

First, that he never refused to instruct those who sincerely desired it.

Secondly, that the bad part of his audience deserved to be left in that ignorance which was intirely owing to their own fault.

I. Our Lord never refused to instruct those who sincerely desired it.

He had wrought many miracles in a public manner, which to honest and unprejudiced persons were a sufficient proof of his divine mission and authority. We will now suppose that amongst the multitudes which followed him, there was one who firmly believed that Christ was a prophet and a teacher of righteousness; we will suppose that this man came to him, hoping to receive instruction, and resolved to make a proper use of it. He hears Christ discourse in parables, and he understands not the meaning of them.

Such an hearer would conclude, that though he did not then comprehend those discourses, or perceive on what account they were delivered so darkly, yet a time might come when he should receive full satisfaction.

Such a person, by once losing his labour, would not be discouraged from seeking other opportunities of hearing Christ; and consequently

quently he would soon have found the reward of his diligence. For as we observed, our Lord frequently taught without parables, and in expressions suited to all capacities; and sometimes when he used parables, either they were so clear, or he so explained them, that it was easier to understand than to mistake him; and therefore when his Disciples ask him the meaning of some of his parables, he gently chides them, and seems to wonder at their dulness and slowness of apprehension.

Such a person would have waited for a proper time to address himself to Christ, and would have besought him to interpret his parables. He would probably have received a favourable answer; for we see by many instances in the New Testament, that Christ rejected not those who had a teachable disposition, and who humbly requested information.

Some have observed, that our Lord did in this as other prophets had done before him, that he delivered himself sometimes in an obscure manner, that they who were lovers of knowledge might be incited to come to him, and to desire him to explain what they had heard. We find that he readily answered many questions relating to religion, and that he only
rejected

rejected inquirers who came with a wicked intention, to accuse him if they could lay hold on any thing that he said ; or indiscreet persons who made improper requests, or sought information concerning points of mere curiosity.

Such an one as we have described, if he was of opinion that sacred knowledge could not be bought at too great a price, would have been a follower of Christ, and a disciple, and by that would have been admitted more frequently to his conversation, and have had many opportunities of acquiring religious wisdom. For Christ had other disciples besides the Twelve and the Seventy ; nor does it appear that he rejected those who were desirous of joining themselves to him. On the contrary, he seems often to give a general invitation to any who would follow him, and submit to the conditions which he required.

Hence we conclude, that our Lord never discouraged any person from approaching him and consulting him, or concealed any necessary knowledge from those who requested it of him in a proper manner.

II. We are to shew, secondly, that the bad part of his audience deserved to be left in an ignorance

ignorance which was entirely owing to their own fault.

Our Lord discourses to the people in parables. We will suppose part of his auditors to have been persons who had Moses and the Prophets, and who would not hear them, who sinned presumptuously against the law which they had received, and would not perform what they already knew to be their duty. It is not strange that Christ should refuse to instruct them, since the instruction which they had received before had produced no good effect upon them. It appears reasonable, that from him who thus hath not should be taken away even that which he hath.

Let us suppose them to have been such as the Prophet Isaiah describes, persons whose heart was waxed gross, and whose ears were dull of hearing, and who had closed their eyes, men so enslaved to their prejudices and vices, that no arguments could satisfy them, and no exhortations could move them. If Christ discoursed darkly to them, it is to be considered, that they hated the light, and hardened themselves against conviction.

Let us suppose, that they had seen some of the works which Christ had wrought, and yet were

were not the more disposed to acknowledge his authority, and to submit to his directions; that they had heard him explain their duty to them in a familiar manner, but with a strength and spirit superior to that of all their teachers, and yet had heard him in vain. No parables could be thought too obscure for them upon whom the plainest doctrines and the testimony of miracles had been thrown away.

Let us suppose them to have been led by no better motive than curiosity, and to have come with no view to correct their faults, or to cultivate their understanding. They hear Christ speaking in parables which they comprehend not, and they depart with the same temper; they neither apply to him nor to his disciples for further instruction, nor do they return to be present at any more of Christ's discourses. Such negligent hearers are justly sent away in ignorance. They take not such pains to acquire sacred knowledge as they would bestow upon the smallest of their temporal concerns. A few disappointments in these pursuits would not make them abate of their zeal and assiduity; but in matters of religion they are indolent, and therefore ignorant. Wisdom shuns the careless, and refuses to attend upon those
who

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who will not pay her the just respect of seeking her.

Let us suppose them full of their national prejudices, persuaded that God would never shew the same favours to the Gentiles as to the Jews, that he would not give up his chosen people to destruction, that the ceremonial law and the temple should abide continually, that the Messias should be a triumphant Prince, who should make them a free people, and subdue all their enemies. If Christ had declared in plain terms some of those truths which he concealed under parables, and laid open to them some of those mysteries which related to the Messias, and to the fates and the fortunes of the Jewish Church and State, he would only have offended and provoked them, and made himself enemies of the greatest part of his hearers.

Let us suppose them to have been slaves to their temporal interests, to have set their whole heart upon the things of this world, and to have been fully determined to part with nothing for the sake of religion. For such persons as these unintelligible parables were as useful doctrines as the plainest parts of the Gospel. If Christ had told them expressly what he expected from them, and what they must expect, if they entered

tered into his service, they would have departed displeased and offended, sorrowful at the best to find that required from them which they were resolved not to perform.

Upon the whole then it may be affirmed, that though our Lord did at certain times discourse obscurely to the mixed multitude, yet he concealed not any necessary knowledge from persons of good dispositions, and left none in ignorance, except those who loved darkness rather than light, and had no inclination either to understand or to perform their duty.

Let us conclude with a few observations.

1. Our Lord has here represented a great part of the Jews as persons devoted to evil, confirmed in bad habits, unworthy of instruction, and not to be reclaimed by a teacher sent from God. It is probable, that his hearers might think these censures very severe, because there was at that time in the nation no small appearance of religion, to say the least of it; they were free from idolatry, observers of the whole ritual law, and of the public worship of God, many of them fasted often, and prayed often, and spent much time in reading the Scriptures, and in hearing them explained.

And

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And yet their behaviour both then and afterwards towards Christ justified his judgment of them, and proved him in this also to be a true prophet. His doctrine, which was pure and reasonable; his miracles, most of which were as remarkable acts of goodness and charity as of power; his example, which might have allured them to imitation, had no good effect upon them; their hearts were hardened, and they continued in their sins and unbelief till destruction overtook them.

2. Our Lord, by veiling his doctrines sometimes under the obscurity of parables, seems to have intended, amongst other things, to teach us that true knowledge is of inestimable value, and that like things of great price, it is not exposed to the idle and careless, is not to be attained without diligent search, and constant pains, and an upright mind.

It hath been observed of knowledge in general, that it is very hard to be acquired, and that Truth not only hides herself from those who set no value upon her, but that she flies even before those who seek her, and is often pursued in vain. The most ingenious and the most industrious have been far from understanding the works of him, who has made all things

things in number, weight and measure. We are strangers even at home, and the soul of man is scarcely known to itself. The great Author of all, though we perceive as much of him as is requisite for religious purposes, is an incomprehensible object, an object which by the most obstinate search we cannot find out to perfection. The various dispensations of Providence, the evil both natural and moral in the rational world, and the miseries to which the brute part of the creation is exposed, are subjects in which there is no small difficulty. But we have no cause to complain on this account of the defect of our understanding, because it is not necessary for us to be accurately skilled in these things, because we shall know more concerning them in a better world, if we secure ourselves a part in it, and because even that imperfect knowledge which we can acquire of it is very valuable, and amply rewards the pains which it costs us.

The holy Scriptures have also their obscurity, which injudicious and irreligious persons will not fail to object. But the Scriptures in matters of general use and concern are plain and express. Yet in some places there are difficulties, which distance of time, and the languages

languages in which they were written, and other circumstances have increased.

Is this obscurity a fault to be charged upon the sacred writers? Certainly not. It may be said, in some respects to have its use. It excites men to employ their time, their learning and abilities in explaining the holy Scriptures, and in vindicating them from profane cavillers. And they who apply themselves to these inquiries with a mind properly disposed, and with other necessary qualifications, will find their labour well bestowed. Ever since the Reformation, and the Revival of Letters, many important discoveries of this kind have been made, and yet the subject is not exhausted, and sagacious and modest industry may still be successfully employed. But those sober and serious persons who are readers of religious treatises should be advised to be careful in making a proper choice, since we are pestered with a variety of books which are mere trash, the effusions of ignorant fanatics, or the patchwork of hungry compilers, who publish neither for the sake of religion, nor for the sake of reputation, but purely for the sake of money.

If the sacred Books had contained nothing besides plain moral precepts, and historical facts related with humble simplicity, this familiarity might have bred contempt. Some mixture of religious obscurity seems not unsuitable to the nature and temper of man, and raises his attention and veneration.

There is a knowledge in which we are all equally concerned, and which therefore may be equally obtained by all. But even this, like the plainest knowledge in human affairs, requires some application and diligence. Nothing worth knowing can be acquired without search; nor is it fit that it should. For to what end did God give us abilities, unless that we should exert them? We are made to think and to act. Bodily labour and exercise are appointed by the wise laws of Providence as the means by which we may not only obtain the things conducing to our support, but be enabled to enjoy them, and preserve our health and strength. The same divine Wisdom has set knowledge at such a distance from the mind, that if we would draw near to it, we must exercise our reason, and improve our understanding, and keep our souls in an active state.

Before

Before we can be skilled in our duty, and find those advantages which the Scriptures promise to those who seek them, some things are to be performed on our part ; we must inquire into God's will with a sincere design to observe it, we must intreat him to bless our endeavours, we must firmly believe that there is more honour and happiness in serving him than in the possession of all that this world can bestow upon us. We shall then experience the truth of our Lord's promise, that he who doeth his will shall know his doctrine, and that to him who hath shall be given, and he shall have more abundantly ; and we shall find in ourselves that peace of mind, that reliance upon God, that love towards him, and that sense of his favour, which will abundantly recompense our virtuous labours.

But if Religion hath the last and lowest place in our minds, we shall sadly experience the truth of that fatal curse pronounced upon hearts so ill disposed, that from him who thus hath not, shall be taken away even that which he hath. Religion, if we take no pleasure in it, will afford us neither comfort nor satisfaction. Doubts of God's goodness, distrust of his providence will grow upon us ; we shall fear him,

and not love him, and our belief of the Gospel will be impaired and weakened every day, or at the last will serve only to reprove and torment us.

SERMON

S E R M O N XIII.

LUKE xvi. 8.

And the lord commended the unjust steward, because he had done wisely.

IN this parable a man is mentioned, who was wealthy, and employed a steward to manage his large revenues. This steward seems to be represented, not as a greedy, covetous person, who defrauded his lord to enrich himself, but rather as careless and profuse, as a man of pleasure and taste, who dissipated his master's fortunes, without purloining and hoarding any part of them for his own use.

The Master, being informed of his misconduct, called him, and said to him, How is it that I hear this of thee? Give an account of thy stewardship; for thou mayest be no longer steward.

Necessity set the man upon thinking how he should provide for himself; and being shrewd and ingenious, and as little furnished with morality as he was with money, he soon found an expedient, and practised it.

He said within himself, What shall I do? for my Lord taketh away from me the stewardship. I cannot dig: to beg I am ashamed. I am resolved what to do, that when I am out of the stewardship, they may receive me into their houses. So he called every one of his Lord's debtors unto him, and said to the first, How much owest thou to my lord? And he said, An hundred measures of oil. And he said to him, Take thy bill, and sit down quickly, and write fifty. Then said he to another, And how much owest thou? And he said, An hundred measures of wheat. And he said to him, Take thy bill, and write fourscore.

The man summoned all his Master's debtors, and seems to have remitted to each of them a considerable part of their debt, by giving them back their note of hand, and taking one for a less sum. Thus he made them a considerable present, and engaged them by ties of gratitude and generosity to relieve him afterwards, and to contribute to his support.

There

There is a thing called *Honour*, which sometimes enters even into the dens of Robbers, and sits at the tables of Gamesters; and men of no justice and integrity may do an act of liberality, and repay one good turn with another, especially to those who are like themselves, to men of honour, and companions in iniquity.

But because there is no depending with security upon gratitude, where there is not a foundation of probity, and the honour of a knave is a precarious thing, the Steward did not trust entirely to this dubious principle, but secured the debtors to himself by more prevailing motives, the motives of self-interest and of fear. He so managed his affairs with them as to make them in some manner accessories and confederates in the fraud, and he had it in his power to turn informer, and bring them into disgrace, if they used him unkindly.

Thus he played as sure a game as he could, and laid up in store a provision for the days of necessity, which he saw were approaching; he guarded himself from two evils of which he was sadly afraid; from working, and from begging.

His Master, accidentally afterwards coming to the knowledge of the whole contrivance and

transaction, applauded him for it. The lord commended the unjust steward, because he had done wisely. He commended the man, not for his dishonesty, to be sure, but for his foresight and subtilty.

A parable like this seemed to require an explication; it was not to be left to the hearers, some of whom might have drawn improper inferences from it. Our Lord did not leave it in obscurity, as he did some other parables delivered to the multitude; he immediately explained it, and pointed out himself the uses and the observations which were to be made from the story: and we will review them, and take them into consideration, following the order in which they stand in the Gospel.

Our Saviour's first remark upon the parable is this; The children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light.

A melancholy and mournful observation, founded upon a thorough knowledge of human nature, and verified by constant experience; but a very important and useful observation, a lesson of humility and caution to the good, of reproof and terror to the wicked, whose wisdom serves only to make them the greatest fools, and the greatest sufferers.

The

The children of this world are they, who mind earthly things, and steadily pursue them, disregarding religion and religious considerations.

The children of light are they, who acknowledge that future happiness is the great end of man, and obedience to God the only way to obtain it; who live under this persuasion, and in some degree act suitably to it; but feel not all the good effects which those principles ought regularly to produce.

The point in which these two sorts of persons are compared, is prudence or wisdom, and the preference is given to the children of this world, as pursuing their worldly interest with more dexterity and steadiness than the others usually exert in securing the end and the recompense which they have in view.

This remark of our Saviour is to be understood, like moral reflections, proverbial sayings, and general propositions, to hold true in the main, though not without various exceptions, since there are bad men, who are very fools as to their worldly views and present advantage; and since there are good men, whose religious wisdom is equal at least to the worldly wisdom of men who mind only things temporal.

But

But for the rest, for the bulk of mankind, it is as our Saviour observes; and human prudence usually surpasseth religious wisdom. The children of this world are wiser in their way than the children of light.

Wisdom is here used in such a sense as to be neither properly a virtue nor a vice, and as a natural rather than a moral quality. It is considered as only a proper method to accomplish any purpose.

A man, as a rational agent, first fixes and proposes to himself an end to be obtained; and then wisdom or judiciousness consists in having a steady regard to that end, in choosing proper means to acquire it, in a diligent and discreet use of those means, in constancy, courage, and patience in the pursuit, and in sacrificing and giving up all that would hurt or disappoint the grand design, and the idol of his heart.

Thus a man may shew much wisdom in securing the object of his desires, though he may choose an object which deserves not his affections, and will not recompense his labours; as an artificer may shew remarkable skill and contrivance in a piece of work, which is a mere useless bawble.

Now

Now the children of this world, in the first place, have a steady regard to the end which they pursue, and never lose sight of it, let it be wealth, or power, or honours, or pleasure. It is their constant object and meditation, their earliest and latest thought; which rises up and lies down with them, goes out and returns home with them. All that they say or do, either hath some reference to it, or at least is not contrary and inconsistent.

But the children of light are seldom so intent as this upon their great concern; sometimes they quite forget and overlook it; sometimes they do things which are absolutely contrary to it; and very often they are busied in affairs that bear no relation to it; so that they are rather good by fits and starts, and at favourable intervals, than with an uniform and consistent steadiness. Hence it is that repentance is, in a manner, a perpetual duty, from which the best are not exempt; frailties and omissions stick close to mortality; and Forgive us our trespasses, is a request to be daily renewed. But the worldly-wise seldom have cause to repent in their way, and to reproach themselves of losing a considerable advantage by their own indis-

indiscretion, and of neglecting a fair and tempting opportunity.

The children of this world are wise in choosing proper means, and finding out the nearest way to compass their ends. They try the most approved expedients; and if they happen to be insufficient, they change them before it is too late, and choose others, and like the diligent spider, whose web is broken, they begin the work again. Christians are seldom equally careful and judicious: they sometimes trust to deceitful hopes, and substitute imperfect expedients to real and substantial goodness, relying too much upon faith, as it means bare believing, upon zeal for a set of opinions, upon frequenting the public worship of God, upon human authority and common custom, upon external ceremonies, upon acts of will-worship, or upon single virtues and some laudable deeds. Hence it is that in the Christian world there is more superstition than morality, and more disputing than practising.

The children of this world are diligent in their pursuits; ever vigilant, patient, laborious, active, busy, and indefatigable; whilst religious people have their cold fits, their intervals of remissness, indifference, negligence,

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formality, and absence of mind. Seldom shall you find a Christian, who is as assiduous in attending upon God, as is the man who hungers and thirsts after promotion or profit, in paying his court to the Great, or to the small.

The children of this world are constant and resolute, they are not to be dejected by difficulties or dangers, discouraged by refusals, tired by labour, seduced by flattery, prevailed upon by importunity, bribed by trifling rewards, persuaded by eloquence, daunted by threatenings, put out of countenance by ridicule, overborne by clamour, or even influenced by reason, to quit their pursuits. But the good, that is, they who are so in a moderate and a lower degree, are in danger of being deterred, unsettled, drawn aside, and overpowered by every impediment and discouragement, every stratagem and artifice, every obstacle to righteousness that works upon their hopes, their fears, their inclinations, and their weak side.

The reason of this difference between the worldly-wise and the religious, and the superiority of the former in pursuing the proposed end, ariseth partly from the following causes :

From the nature of the things which are present, and seize upon the senses, and lay hold on

on the heart of man, whilst things spiritual and intellectual are invisible and remote, and act accordingly in a fainter manner. Sensible objects appear, as it were, more real, certain, solid, and substantial, because they may be looked upon and handled. This is a powerful illusion, and creates a prejudice which it requires some labour to remove. As soon as man is able to know a little of himself and of the objects about him, he contracts an acquaintance and a familiarity with those objects, which daily insinuate themselves into his affections; whilst Reason makes slower advances, and Truth and Virtue have a more austere appearance, and are not to be received and relished without serious application of mind, and some degree of self-denial. If to this early bent and regard to things visible be unfortunately added a bad education and bad example, religion becomes irksome, and religious wisdom a difficult acquisition. And thus it comes to pass that the children of this world are too often wiser in their generation than the children of light.

Now the design of our Saviour in this moral reflection was, to remind us that something may be learned even from those whose choice is absurd, and whose practice is blameable. They
stand

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stand before us examples to be shunned in some respects, and to be copied in others.

Nature in all her parts, and every creature, preaches some useful doctrine to us, if we know how to meditate properly upon it. We may learn constancy from the sun, moon, and stars, which keep their appointed courses; honesty and gratitude from the earth, which faithfully preserves what is committed to her care, and repays with interest the labour bestowed upon her; industry from the animals who provide against hunger and bad weather, and change of seasons, and the assaults of their enemies; obedience and sense of obligation from the domestic creatures, who love their master, and serve him as well as they can. Go to the ant, thou sluggard, says Solomon; go to the ant, who is at work in the summer, whilst thou art doing nothing. And thou Israel, says the Prophet, who regardest not thy great Benefactor, learn thy duty from the ox and the ass, who know the hand that feeds them. As instruction may be gathered from the brutes, who are wise and sagacious in their way; so may it be learned from worldly men, another sort of brutes, whose skill and dexterity is worthy of our

our imitation, though they employ it to mean or to bad purposes.

A second use intended by our Lord in this reflection might be to excite persons of religious principles to their duty, by exposing their defects, and raising in them an ingenuous shame and confusion of face at their being so much outdone by men so much inferior to them in moral qualities. Disgrace and contempt is the just portion of those who act beneath themselves and against themselves, who neglect to perform what their own reason approves, their own conscience requires, and their own abilities, supported by the divine assistance, might easily accomplish. In care and caution, in zeal and assiduity, they ought to surpass the children of this world, even because the motives by which they are actuated are superior, as much as heaven is above the earth, and eternity beyond time. Happiness without measure and without end is more valuable than the conveniences of a few days, and those deceitful pleasures which fade away even in the enjoyment. Let us not distrust so far any one's understanding, as to go about to prove this.

Thus persons of good dispositions, but of slender improvements, are reminded by our

Saviour of their many defects; and a sense of these frailties, of this inconsistent, cold, remiss, and languid behaviour, should excite not only their diligence, but their humility also. It may serve to secure them at least from presumption and spiritual pride, which are great impediments in our way to peace and happiness. Strait is the gate, says our Lord, that leads to life, and few there are who will struggle to get through. It is low also, and he must bend and stoop down, and not carry his head too high, who hopes to enter in at it.

A third use which religious persons are to make of their own defects, is to admire and adore the divine goodness and compassion, as it is revealed in the Gospel. Nothing can surpass, nothing can equal the rewards which are there proposed to the good steward, to the faithful and diligent servant: the bare hope of them should be sufficient to counterbalance all the evils of life, and all the pleasures of sin. But, alas, what would these promises avail us, if the terms upon which they are propounded were such as men never perform exactly, if they were, though not absolutely impracticable, yet bordering upon impossibilities? This would be only to tempt and to mock us with

glories placed within the view, but lying beyond the reach of weak mortality. Therefore God, in condescension to our infirmities, allows of repentance, and limits no time of life when that repentance shall be unavailing. To perfect righteousness the Gospel substitutes repentance, which like the cities of refuge given to the Israelites, stands open to shelter us from vengeance, and to receive the poor unhappy offender into its humble mansions, where dwells shame and sadness of heart, but accompanied with a faith and a hope which exclude despair.

And for a farther encouragement to imperfect creatures, the Gospel hath represented the future state of the good as a wide-extended realm, in which are various abodes, and various ranks, suited to the various qualifications and dispositions of the inhabitants for whom they are allotted. There is indeed no peace for the wicked, no honours for the incorrigible, for the totally negligent and the wilfully obstinate; nothing to be expected, but indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish. But it is to be hoped that there are favourable allowances even for lower degrees of piety and industry, though our goodness hath not equalled that

that of Apostles, Confessors and Martyrs, of holy persons, whose trials have been severe, and labours manifold, and victories complete, and examples bright and glorious.

The next remark, which our Saviour makes upon the parable, is this ; and I say unto you, Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness, that when ye fail, they may receive you, that is, that ye may be received into everlasting habitations.

Which is as much as to say, Learn from the unjust steward this wisdom at least, the wisdom of consideration and forecast, and of providing for a time of necessity. What he was, that you all are, in one respect ; you are in an office of trust. Every man is a steward ; he hath abilities, talents, power, knowledge, credit, reputation, and worldly possessions. These things, when we have them, we commonly account and call our own. But it is not so : they are committed, lent, and trusted to us by the great Lord and House-holder, whose servants and stewards we are.

Our worldly possessions are here called, the mammon of unrighteousness, that is, unrighteous and ungodly riches. No man surely can be so weak or perverse as to think that our

Saviour exhorts us here to make a good use of wealth ill-gotten ; for a man hath no right to make any use at all of it : but riches, in figurative language, and in the style of Scripture, may be called ~~un~~unrighteous on various accounts ; first, because they frequently excite envy and irregular desires in those who long for them ; secondly, because they are often obtained by methods not altogether fair and honourable ; thirdly, because they often prove temptations to evil, and corrupters of the heart ; fourthly, because they are of their own nature unrighteous, that is, false and treacherous, not at all stable and permanent, easily lost, useful only for a few days, productive of cares and troubles, and of a long train of evils, deceiving and disappointing all those who place their trust in them, and who expect to find in them the utmost comfort and satisfaction. In opposition to this, virtue and the rewards of virtue are called by our Saviour true riches, and things which are our own, as being a real possession and an eternal property.

Make to yourselves friends of deceitful and unrighteous riches, that when ye depart hence, ye may be received into everlasting habitations. As the steward in the parable so employed

ployed the revenues committed to his care, as to purchase friends and protectors, do you the same in an honest way. Use your possessions in such a manner as to acquire to yourselves friends both in heaven and on earth; promote the honour and the service of God here below, and do good to your fellow creatures, and thus you will secure the prayers and the blessings of those whom you oblige, and the favour and approbation of good Angels in heaven, of the holy Spirit, of Jesus Christ, and of the God and Father of all.

As the steward provided houses where he might be received, when he was dismissed from his service; so do you apply yourselves to obtain an habitation in heaven.

As the steward was called to an account by his lord, so will it be with you. Every disease that afflicts you, every day that goes over your heads, and brings you nearer to your last end, every example of mortality that passeth before your eyes, says to you, Give an account of thy stewardship, for thou mayest be no longer steward.

Our Saviour therefore points out to us the right use of our possessions, and that is, so to employ them as to avoid the two extremes of

covetousness and of prodigality, which as they are opposite to each other, are also opposite to charity: the first will give nothing, and the second hath nothing to give.

Man is not born for himself alone, but for others also. Our children and families, our relations and friends, and all who stand in need of our help, and deserve it, have a claim to our benevolence. We must serve them according to our abilities; and he who hath wealth is obliged to encourage and assist industrious poverty, helpless misery, useful learning, virtue, and religion, and to promote the public welfare. This is to be a good steward, and to lay up wisely for eternity.

Another reflection made by our Saviour upon the parable, is contained in these words; He that is faithful in that which is least, is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least, is unjust also in much. If therefore ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous Mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches? And if ye have not been faithful in that which is another's, who shall give you that which is your own?

This world is a state of probation, and a few temporal possessions are now committed to our hands:

hands : they are precarious, and they are of small value ; but they are as much as human creatures are capable of managing ; and by lending them to us, God puts us to the trial, whether we may be fit for better gifts. If a man is unfaithful in these things, which are, comparatively speaking, inconsiderable, and which are not his own, how can he expect to receive an eternal and unchangeable inheritance hereafter, to enter into a far more exalted and important station, and to be made ruler over many things in a better world ?

The last remark of our Saviour is this ; No servant can serve two masters.—Ye cannot serve God and Mammon.

Would you secure to yourselves eternal happiness ? you must make religion your first care, and the favour of God the principal and leading object of your views.

Learn this from the children of this world, who have indeed made a bad choice, but pursue it in a proper manner. The world is their Friend and their Counsellor, their Father and their patron, their Lord and their God, whom they serve with wicked sincerity, and with unrighteous perseverance ; and therefore they are wiser, in their way, than those worldly Chris-

tians, who would fain divide their duty between God and Mammon.

But neither God nor Mammon will bear a rival. Mammon is imperious and crafty, and will have all or none: give him the one half of yourself, and he will soon seize the other. God also requires the whole heart; and when he takes possession of it, worldly affections are extinguished, as earthly fires die away, when the sun shines upon them in his full strength.

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S E R M O N XIV.

LUKE X. 30.

A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, who stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead.

THE parable of the good Samaritan sets before us an example of charity, which is far beyond the ordinary pitch of human goodness, as it will appear from several incidents and circumstances in the story, which usually escape the observation of common and careless readers. Every one can discern thus much, that the hero of the parable was a compassionate and a generous man; but to what a degree he was so, few will apprehend unless the particulars be unfolded to them.

The first design of our Saviour, when he related the story, was to convince a learned Jew, with

with whom he was discoursing, that true charity required more than he imagined. His other and main intention was to teach all persons the nature and the extent of benevolence and brotherly love.

In this, as in some other of our Lord's occasional discourses, may be observed a wonderful art of persuasion, and a masterly way of gaining a controverted point, by setting examples and facts before prejudiced or doubting persons, and making them draw the conclusion themselves. By this method a man is surpris'd into concessions which at first he did not intend to make; and is pleas'd at the same time with his judgment, as if his determination were partly a discovery of his own, and not a doctrine forced upon him by his teacher. There is a pride in man, which makes him uneasy when he feels his inferiority to another, and is foiled and overcome, even in the argumentative way, and he likes as little to be out-reasoned or outwitted, as to be subdued by mere bodily strength. This often puts him upon evasions and elusions to supply the want of fair proofs.

Another excellence in this, and perhaps in some other parables, is that in all probability
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it is not a bare fiction, but a true history, and a matter of fact. This is the opinion of some, amongst whom is Grotius, one of the most learned and judicious Commentators on the holy Scriptures. Now this gives an additional force to the instruction, when we have reason to think that we are not entertained with an imaginary character adorned with fictitious embellishments, but with a faithful portrait drawn from the life, and with the real behaviour of a real person.

A Doctor of the Law asked our Saviour, Master, what shall I do, to inherit eternal life? Our Saviour, in return, asked him, who was a teacher of the Law, what the Law itself had declared concerning it; as willing to hear his opinion, and to acquiesce in it, if it was reasonable. He said to him, what is written in the law? how readest thou?

The man replied; Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself.

Our Saviour consented to this, and commended him; Thou hast answered right.

So far then he had judged well, in not choosing the law of sacrifices, or of the Sabbath,

or

or any ceremonial precepts, as principal duties; but in supposing the love of God and the love of our neighbour to be the two great commandments. Therefore said Christ to him, Thou hast answered right : this do, and thou shalt live.

But he, willing to justify himself, said unto Jesus; And who is my neighbour?

Willing to justify himself.

As to the love of God, we may suppose that this Doctor, having never been guilty of idolatry, or apostacy, and having observed the Jewish ritual, might think that he had kept this commandment. But he was conscious to himself, that his justification, as to his performance of the social duties, depended upon the interpretation that should be given to the word *neighbour*; and that if it meant any thing farther than the expounders of the Law commonly understood by it, he had practised none of those things, and could not pretend to have been such a friend to mankind.

According to the bare and strict letter of the Law, by the word *neighbour* seemed to be meant either an Israelite, or a stranger dwelling in the land: and as, by the Law, the Jews could not converse freely and hold much intercourse

tercourse with the Gentiles; so neither could the Gentiles easily live with them, and conform to all that was necessary to qualify themselves for inmates. It is therefore to be supposed, that whilst the people of Israel and Judah were ruled by their own kings, and were religious and prosperous, few or no strangers took up their habitation in the land of Judæa, unless they were conformists, and profelytes, in some measure at least, to the Jewish religion.

But when our Saviour came, things were much altered with the Jews in this respect. As their nation became a Roman province, they had a Pagan governor, and Pagan publicans, soldiers, and merchants amongst them, and a far greater resort of Gentiles Greek and Roman, than in the more ancient times.

The Jews were not then confined, as they had been formerly, within their own territories; but the captivities and migrations had dispersed multitudes of them in various parts of the world, where they dwelt amongst the Gentiles.

In those days Philosophy had received considerable improvements, and was in great vogue amongst the Gentiles; and the Jews themselves were in some degree acquainted with it.

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The Pagan Moralists, though very deficient in some other respects, had made excellent remarks on the social duties; and the wiser part of them used to consider man as a citizen of the world, who was obliged to exercise good offices towards all men, even for the sake of one common nature, by which all are brethren; and the Gentiles ridiculed and reproached the Jews for their unsociable temper, their narrow notions of benevolence, and their caring for none besides their own countrymen.

The learned Jews, who had conversed with the Gentiles, and seen their writings, seem to have been sensible that the reproach was not entirely groundless, and ashamed of lying under a bad character on that account. Josephus, their Historian, wrote a book to answer the calumnies thrown upon his nation by a spiteful and a lying Pagan. He takes great pains in it to shew, amongst other things, that the Jews exercised more humanity and charity even to strangers and aliens, and that their Law required more, than was supposed and reported by their malicious adversaries. And in this, Josephus acts the part of a skilful and a subtle advocate for his nation, and in some instances

stances makes the best that he can of an indifferent cause.

It is very probable that the Doctor of the Law, who was conversing with Jesus Christ, was one of those who thought that the precept of loving a neighbour as one's self extended only to a Jew, or to a Profelyte; and that as to other Gentiles, a Jew was to shun and disregard them, and to content himself with observing the bare negative duty of doing them no injuries, and of abstaining carefully from all acts of violence or of fraud towards them. He therefore, willing to justify himself, said unto Jesus; And who is my neighbour?

Our Saviour did not go about to convince him, by arguments drawn up in form, that his notions on this point were mean and contracted; for the man, if he had parts and learning, would never have been silenced that way, he would always have found a reply, and some subterfuge or other, and would have departed from the friendly conference, fixed in his old opinions, or doubtful, and acknowledging that much might be offered on both sides of the question.

Our Saviour took a shorter and a better way, and made him the decider of the question, by
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telling him a story of an affair that had lately happened between a Jew and a Samaritan, and desiring his opinion upon it. The disputant, struck with the irresistible beauty of the action, applauded the Samaritan, and so condemned himself and his countrymen.

A certain man, says our Lord, went down from Jerusalem to Jericho; and fell among thieves, who stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. And by chance there came down a certain Priest that way; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side.

The Priest and the Levite should have acted suitably to their education, station, and character, and should have thought it their duty to distinguish themselves above others in piety and humanity on this pressing occasion, especially towards a Jew. The Law of Moses required thus much, even upon the lowest and the laxest interpretation, when it said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. The Law also said; If thou meet thine enemy's ox or his ass going astray, thou shalt surely bring it back

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to him again. If thou see the ass of him that hateth thee, lying under his burden, thou shalt surely help with him. If such kindness was to be shewed to an enemy, and to an enemy's beast, much more was a Jew obliged to assist a distressed man, who was not his enemy, and who was one of his brethren.

Yet it is to be supposed that the Priest and the Levite, if they had been censured for their behaviour, would have had some apology to make for themselves, some sort of excuse to offer. They might, for example, have pleaded that they were obliged to * attend upon the service of the temple, and that if the wounded traveller expired in their hands, they should contract a legal impurity, and be polluted, and unfit for their religious functions; or that they had pressing domestic affairs which called for them in haste; or that they had no money or provisions which they could spare for the man's relief; or that if they loitered in taking care of him, they might be attacked by the same or by other ruffians; for the highways of Judæa at that time were grievously infested with rob-

* Of the Priest, perhaps, this cannot be so well supposed, because he was *going down, nalkam*, that is, was going from Jerusalem towards Jericho.

bers, and this evil grew worse and worse afterwards, till the destruction of Jerusalem.

They thought themselves therefore excused and justified, and left the Jew to his hard fate; but probably not without bestowing upon him a blessing which cost them nothing, and putting up a prayer that some other person might come and relieve him.

The apologies which they made, or might have made, are not mentioned by our Saviour. It would not have been so proper to mention them; for the man, with whom he was discoursing, might have been induced to defend them as sufficient excuses; and then the story would have lost its effect upon him, and our Saviour's design would have been defeated. It was enough for the purpose, that the Priest and the Levite had not acted the friendly part on this occasion. They came, they saw, and they departed.

At last, the Samaritan beheld him. He had more and stronger motives to leave the miserable object, than the Priest or the Levite had; and yet his compassion prevailed over all objections and impediments.

But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him

he

he had compassion on him, and went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And on the morrow, when he departed, he took out two pieces of silver, and gave them to the host, and said to him, Take care of him, and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee. Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among thieves? And he said, He that shewed mercy on him. Then said Jesus unto him, Go and do thou likewise.

The man that shewed mercy on the Jew was a Samaritan. After the ten tribes of Israel had been carried away captives, never to return any more, the king of Assyria sent a colony of Pagans into the land of Israel, and gave them an Israelite priest, to teach them the law of Moses, and the worship of the God of the country. Thus the Samaritans remained for a long time worshippers of their own false Gods, and of the true God in conjunction with them. But after the Jews of Jerusalem had returned from their Babylonian captivity, the Samaritans built a temple to God in Samaria,

ria, and left off their idolatry, and became worshippers of the true God alone. They would have joined themselves in communion with the returning Jews, but being rejected, a hatred commenced between these two nations and near neighbours, that was carried to the utmost inveteracy and rage ever afterwards.

In the time then of our Saviour, the Samaritans were Jews by religion, and Gentiles by extraction; though this they denied, and fancied or pretended that they were true Israelites descended from Jacob, and of the tribe of Joseph.

They received the Law of Moses, and observed it. Whether they admitted any other books of the Old Testament, is not clear. They believed the doctrine of the resurrection, and of a future state, and they expected the coming of the Messias.

But the Jews hated them more than they hated the Pagans, declared them to lie under the eternal curse of God both here and hereafter, would hold no communication with them, and would not even receive them as proselytes. The Samaritans were not greatly behind-hand in returning them railing for railing, and evil for

for evil; and instances of this mutual aversion are to be found in the New Testament, and in other ancient books.

The Samaritans, by erecting a temple and an altar in their own country, as in the place appointed of God himself for it, and in opposition to the temple at Jerusalem, were schismatics; and at first many discontented and schismatical Jews went over to them. As to the place of worship, and the ceremonial part of religion, our Saviour decided the question against the Samaritans, in his discourse with a woman of that country.

But their schism seems to have been a small and a pardonable fault, considering the strong prejudices of education, the hatred with which the Jews pursued them, the very bad character and conduct of the greater part in those days, and the impossibility of holding communion with them.

Our Saviour went and paid them a charitable visit, and found them better disposed to receive him than the Jews were. Many of them believed in him, and many more were called and converted by his Disciples. Amongst the Samaritan converts we may reasonably reckon the

man who was cured of the leprosy, and who signalized himself by his gratitude to his benefactor, and returned to give him thanks; and the charitable Traveller in this parable, who had such an amiable disposition, and was so well fitted to receive the Gospel. One may venture to suppose that our Lord, who was goodness itself, and who loved goodness in others, would have taken a journey to Samaria, even for the sake of this one man.

The Samaritan was travelling from home towards Jerusalem, a place not much frequented by his countrymen, perhaps to appear before the Roman governor, or perhaps to proceed still farther on some necessary affairs. He had the same motives of fear and of self-preservation, as the Priest or the Levite could plead, to make the best of his way, and leave the wounded man, lest the same evil should befall him.

He was in Judæa, that is, in an enemy's country, and surrounded with enemies, in a place where none would have pitied and relieved him, if he had fallen into any distress. He had the more reason to hasten on, and to take particular care of his own safety.

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The wounded traveller was indeed an object proper to excite compassion ; but he was a Jew, an enemy to the Samaritan, one who would not have stopped to do him a good office, if he had been in the like condition, who perhaps would have helped to dispatch him, or have bestowed a curse upon him, and one from whom he had little reason to expect even so much as bare thanks.

But he, not moved by fear, or self-interest, or resentment, or misguided zeal, came immediately to his relief, he dismounted from his horse, he dressed the man's wounds, bestowing upon him the things that he had provided for his own use on his journey. He set him on his own beast, and with expence, loss of time, danger, labour, and fatigue, he conducted him to an inn, and stayed with him all night. On the morrow he gave the host two pieces of silver, as earnest, for the man's lodging, promising at his return to repay all further charges.

Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour to him that fell among thieves ? And he said, He that shewed mercy on him. Then said Jesus unto him, Go and do thou likewise.

Having explained the parable, I proceed to speak of the * behaviour which it recommends to us.

From this parable then we may observe, that though a good religion hath a natural tendency to make good men, and a right faith to produce a right behaviour, yet so it is that we often see a contrary effect; that persons, who have more opportunities to understand true religion, are very deficient in the practical, which is the principal part, and flatter themselves, that the purity of their faith and their zeal for externals shall make up for the want of morality. This was notoriously the case of the Jews; and therefore our Saviour sends them to learn their duty to their neighbour from an alien, an heretic, a schismatic, an heterodox Samaritan, who practised it so much better than they.

* An humour hath prevailed amongst our Fanatics to seek after refined, imaginary, mystical, and allegorical interpretations of the Scriptures, to slight the obvious and the true sense, and to find what was never meant. Many such conceits, of which I shall take no notice, have been discovered in this parable, by a sort of second sight, or by a deception of sight, and as men descry castles and dragons in the clouds.

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We ought to account every man our neighbour, though a stranger, an enemy, a sinner, or, which is the same thing, as a sinner in common estimation, one of a different sect or persuasion. Let him be what he will, he is an human creature, and as such he is intitled to humanity and courtesy in common intercourse; to direction and instruction if he asks it and stands in need of it, and to relief and assistance if he is in distress. There are rules of justice, equity, and mercy to be observed even in war, and one of the great benefits which Christianity hath produced, is that it hath made the nations where it is received, less savage and cruel, generally speaking, than they were before, and better behaved towards captives and prisoners of war.

The ancient Romans, whom we are too apt to admire for their valour and patriotism, were notoriously guilty in their behaviour towards other nations. Their boasted love of their country was at the bottom just such a virtue as that of a band of Robbers, sparing none who fall into their hands, and then very honourably delivering up all the plunder, for the benefit of the community.

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As to particular persons, considered as men, they are obliged to be humane and charitable to all; considered as Christians, they are still more obliged to it, from precept, from example, and from gratitude.

It is true that as we stand variously related to others, so we owe them more or fewer services. Our good offices are due, first to parents and kindred, to our own family, to our intimate friends, and to our benefactors; then to our neighbours, to those of our own religion, and of our own country; lastly, to strangers, of what place or persuasion soever, and to enemies, to the unkind and unthankful.

These degrees of love, affection, and regard to different persons may suggest to evil tempers an obvious excuse from the performance of some charitable deeds; and the excuse is this: If we are to regulate our kindness to others according to these relations which they bear to us, there are so many miserable objects in the world, that a stranger, an alien from the faith, and a personal enemy can never come in for a share, since there will be always needy persons who have a juster title to our favour.

To

To this it may be replied; Humanity towards all men without exception, and a temper inclining us to shew them kindness, is required from us. The application of this general duty must be left to chance and opportunity, to discretion and prudence, and it is impossible to lay down fixed rules concerning it. Generally speaking, a friend and a neighbour is to be preferred to a stranger and a foreigner. But there is one plain exception, and the Parable suggests it to us. When a man is a stranger amongst strangers, and in the utmost need and distress, he is on that very account of being a stranger, better entitled to our favour, protection, assistance, and relief, than one, who in other respects, and at other times, should have the preference. Do we want a proof of this truth? It is obvious: we need only suppose ourselves to be in the same hard situation, and consider what we should think of those who should insult or neglect us in a strange land, and how extremely we should account ourselves obliged to any good Samaritan, who should have compassion on us. The heart is not at a loss to return a proper answer; and Reason draws the inference, Go, and do thou likewise.

And now, I might safely leave it to your own selves to apply the foregoing discourse to the present occasion. For me to say much about it, would be superfluous: to say nothing, would be slighting. Let a few words suffice.

This is an act of disinterested charity; for these children can make you no return—except thanks and good wishes.

It is an act of public charity; since the welfare of the nation, both present and future, is closely connected with it.

It is an act of comprehensive charity, as it tends to relieve the body, to instruct the mind, and to save the soul of those who are the objects of it.

Poor people, if in their youth they have behaved tolerably well, know, and are known, and can set forth their necessities, and plead their own cause. Poor children are friendless and helpless; they are in reality poor orphans, for if they have parents, those parents cannot support them. As to their spiritual wants, scarcely are they sensible of them; and as to their temporal wants, they feel them, but know not how and to whom to represent them.

Name

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Name me a charity which hath more motives to recommend it ; and if you cannot, (as I am sure you cannot) let your accustomed favour be continued to these humble petitioners.

S E R M O N

There is no charity which hath more to give
to mankind than if you cannot (as I have
before) cannot let your soul be bound by it
and to that humble position. I would
not let a soul be bound by it. I would
let a soul be bound by it.

[illegible]

It is an act of public charity; for the
 fare of the nation. It is urgent and highly
 suitably connected with it.

It is an act of comprehensive charity, it tends to relieve the body, to instruct the mind, and to save the soul of those who are the objects of it.

Poor people, if in their youth they have been
taught seriously well, know, and are known
and can tell how they do, and they
their own name. Poor children, who
and suffer, they are in reality poor, and
the poor have parents, who are poor, and

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

SERMON XV.

MARK xi. 21, 22.

And Peter calling to remembrance, saith to him; Master, behold the fig-tree which thou cursedst is withered away. And Jesus answering saith to them, Have faith in God.

ST. Mark tells us, that as Jesus was coming from Bethany to Jerusalem, he was hungry. It was in the spring, a little before the Passover, in March or April; and as St. Mark observes, the time of figs, that is, the time of common figs, was not yet. Jesus saw one fig-tree at a distance, which was of the uncommon and scarcer sort, and which had leaves; but when he came to it, he found no fruit, ripe or unripe: upon which he said, No man eat fruit of thee hereafter; and the fig-tree withered away.

Hence we may observe these things:

I. The

I. The Law of Moses contains many hospitable and charitable precepts, shewing a singular regard to the needy and the distressed. Amongst which are these in Leviticus and Deuteronomy ;

When ye reap the harvest of your land, thou shalt not wholly reap the corners of thy field, neither shalt thou gather the gleanings of thy harvest. And thou shalt not glean thy vineyard, nor gather every grape. Thou shalt leave them for the poor and stranger. When thou cuttest down thy harvest, and hast forgot a sheaf in the field, thou shalt not go again to fetch it. It shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow,

When thou comest into thy neighbour's vineyard, then thou mayest eat grapes thy fill, at thy pleasure ; but thou shalt not put any in thy vessel. When thou comest into the standing corn of thy neighbour, then thou mayest pluck the ears with thy hand ; but thou shalt not move a sickle unto thy neighbour's standing corn.

Thus a permission and a privilege was granted to the poor, the stranger, and the traveller to eat of the fruits of the field and vineyard, though not to carry away. And in so fertile a country

country as Judea was, there might be fruit-trees by the side of the road, which were no private property. Christ therefore had the right of poverty and necessity, and the express leave of the Law for acting as he did. This is a sufficient answer to a scandalous * objection which hath been made, What right had he to the fruit? an objection which betrays as much ignorance as rudeness, and which the Jews would never have made to Christ, because they knew their own law. Therefore, when the Disciples, on a sabbath day, passing through the corn fields, plucked the ears of corn to eat them, the Pharisees did not accuse them of theft or robbery, but only of sabbath breaking.

Another objection hath been made of the same kind; What right had he to destroy the tree? That is, in other words, What right had he to work miracles? An objection which scarcely deserves an answer. However, it may be answered that the tree, as St. Matthew says, grew by the way-side, and probably had no owner; and that it was a barren tree, and of no † value.

* Woolston.

† The wood of this tree is useless even to a proverb: *inutile lignum*. ἄργη σάκεα, *homo ficulneus*.

But it is worthy of observation, that the wonderful works of Christ were all of the merciful kind, and that he never wrought a miracle of severity upon any person. His compassion he shewed to every one who stood in need of it, and implored his assistance: his indignation he exercised only on one barren tree. Thus he distinguished himself from Moses and from the Prophets who were before him, and who were often the ministers of God's wrath against the wicked.

II. I observe that this action and behaviour of our Lord in seeking fruit, and in appearing to be offended at the disappointment, and pronouncing a curse upon the barren tree, had a moral import, and was designed to convey instruction, and to represent something worthy of particular notice.

The Jewish Prophets, as the wise men of neighbouring and Eastern nations, had used to convey instruction frequently by parables; and as frequently by signs or actions. Thus one of them caused himself to be smitten and wounded; another carried out his household stuff on his shoulders in the sight of the people. And in this the false prophets imitated the true ones, and one of them made himself iron horns, and pushed

pushed with them, to declare to king Ahab that he should overthrow his enemies. In the Acts of the Apostles, the prophet Agabus took St. Paul's girdle, and bound his own hands and feet, and said, Thus shall the Jews do to the owner of this girdle. And in the Revelation, the Angel takes up a great stone, and casts it into the sea, saying, Thus shall Babylon be thrown down, and seen no more. Our Saviour, like the ancient prophets, frequently taught by parables, wherein, as in all other respects, he surpassed them all; for his parables had a two-fold use, and were often prophecies also. But he did not often teach by action, because that seemed less solemn, and less suitable to his transcendent dignity. We find only two instances of his conveying instruction in this manner, his causing the fig-tree to perish, and his washing the feet of his disciples.

III. The Apostles have recorded concerning themselves, that they were simple and ignorant men, and slow of apprehension; which appears in some measure from the transaction of which we are now speaking. For the behaviour of Christ in seeking fruit, and condemning the tree, had something singular in it, which might have excited their curiosity; and

the moral contained in it was, as we shall shew, obvious enough; and yet they seem neither to have taken much notice of the thing, nor to have suspected an hidden sense in it, nor to have asked him what was his intention and view in acting so. But the day after, when they saw that the tree was dead, they all marvelled at it, as if they had never seen him work a miracle before, saying, How soon is the tree withered away! And Peter said to Jesus, Master, behold, the fig-tree which thou cursedst is withered away! As the Disciples did not apprehend the design of Christ, nor ask him about it, he gave them no information concerning it, but adapting his discourse to their present disposition, and observing their surprise, he took occasion to exhort them to faith, a qualification which they wanted, and for the want of which he had often reproved them. He said to them, Have faith in God: for verily I say unto you, that whosoever shall say to this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea, and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that those things which he saith shall come to pass, he shall have whatsoever he saith.

Many reasons might be assigned for which
Christ

Christ required this high degree of faith from his followers. But I shall at present only mention two.

The Apostles were to be employed in preaching the Gospel, and in confirming it by wonderful works. If such persons had discovered a distrust concerning God's assistance, it would have been a disgrace to themselves, and to their sacred cause, and have raised suspicions in others that there was something dishonest at the bottom.

The employment to which the Apostles were appointed was as dangerous as it was honourable. They were to encounter all sorts of difficulties and perils. In such circumstances and trials, as a man's faith is, so will his courage be and his resolution. If the first be weak and wavering, the second will have the same defects. Nothing good and great, no bold attempt, no suffering for the sake of truth, is to be expected from a person who is inconstant, irresolute, and diffident.

IV. The moral sense of our Saviour's action is so evident, that it is not easy to mistake it. The Jews were a nation of husbandmen, and the Scriptures abound with allusions to rural

occupations, and to the objects which they afford. Good men are frequently compared to fruitful trees, and bad men to barren and withered plants. In the prophecies of Jeremiah, mention is made of two baskets of figs, the one very good, the other very bad. The good figs are said to represent those Jews whom God was resolved to favour and protect; the bad to be a figure of those whom he gave up to utter destruction. Our Saviour also spake a parable of a fig-tree which, though cultivated with all possible care, had borne no fruit for three years, and was to have one year more of trial, and then was to be cut down, if it produced nothing; in which he alluded to the time and pains which he had bestowed in preaching to the Jews, and to their obstinacy, and to the punishment which would soon follow it.

And now, to come to our subject; The trees which at that time had neither fruit nor leaves, and from which Christ did not expect or seek any thing, may be supposed to represent the Gentiles, who as in general they had little piety and goodness, so they did not pretend to any, nor was religious hypocrisy a prevailing vice amongst them. Their season of amendment was not come, the sun of righteousness had not shined

shined upon them, the Gospel had not been preached to them ; from them therefore the less was to be required. But the tree which seemed to be in a flourishing condition, and to promise fruit, and yet had nothing besides leaves, was an exact figure of the Jews. They had a divine revelation to guide them, by which they were distinguished from all nations ; they had the public worship of God established amongst them, they were free from idolatry, they had the appearance of sanctity and religion ; but it was all outside shew, all hypocrisy and dissimulation, and no solid and substantial goodness ; they had nothing besides leaves ; and therefore by a just judgment this * nothing was to be taken away from them, And as the deceitful tree at the rebuke of Christ sickened and drooped, and withered and died away ; so their national distinction and privilege, their temple, their public legal worship, of which they made so poor an use, were to be no longer continued to them, their city also was to be destroyed, their country made desolate, and themselves

* Nil habuit—Et tamen illud
Perdidit infelix totum nil.—

either cut off in a miserable manner, or driven and dispersed over the face of the earth.

The inferences and uses which are to be made from the preceding remarks are these:

God is good to all, and his tender mercies are over all his works. Happiness is the end for which every rational creature is made, and the means of obtaining it are afforded to every one; and if this be true, the justice and the equity and the goodness of the Creator cannot fairly be impeached. But yet, as God hath made a variety of creatures more or less excellent, so he also dispenses his gifts to nations and to particular persons according to his own good pleasure, and no reason is to be required, or perhaps can be assigned for these gifts, besides the will of the donor, who may do what he thinks fit with his own. Something of this kind is implied in the parable of the Labourers in the vineyard. They who laboured only one hour, received a day's wages; and they who had toiled the whole day, received no more. The principal design of this parable seems to have been to declare that the Gentiles, though called late to the knowledge of God and of religion, should have equal favours and privileges with the Jews. But besides this,

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it also teaches us that God will bestow his gifts as he thinks proper in his own wisdom. The behaviour of the Householder seems at first sight exceptionable and blameable, and expressing the character of a capricious and fantastical man; but this objection may be removed by supposing that he acted with an intention to try the temper of those whom he had hired. If they had behaved themselves modestly and humbly, and besought him to consider their case, they would have deserved some favour, and they would have received it from a person who was so generous, and who had overpaid the last comers. But instead of intreating, they murmured and railed at him; upon which he resolved to give them no more than what justice required, and to reserve his liberality for those who deserved it better.

In matters then of mere grace and bounty, various advantages are conferred upon some in a larger measure than upon others, to which the receivers have no claim, and which they have done nothing to merit. Of this kind are external conveniences, as wealth, and power, and honours; natural blessings, as health and strength of body, and great abilities of mind; religious advantages, as a good disposition,
moderate

moderate passions, a situation of life remote from many temptations, a sober and liberal education, means of obtaining sacred knowledge, and of improving the heart. In like manner, preternatural and miraculous gifts were dispensed when the Gospel was first preached; the Holy Spirit of God imparted them severally to every one, according to his own pleasure, and not always according to the piety and moral qualifications of men. All this, to the unthinking and injudicious, may have the appearance of prejudice and partiality. But many things concur to make these various dispensations of Providence not so unequal as they may seem, and to justify the ways of the Almighty. For the advantages and blessings, which one person possesses above another, require particular and proportionable returns of gratitude and diligence and discretion. They must not be abused and employed against his honour and service from whom they proceed: they must not be neglected and suffered to turn to no account; they must be cultivated and exercised in the best manner; and all this requires much labour and care and resolution, and is attended with much danger also. To represent this in the language of the Gospel, To one are

given ten talents, to another two; and if they use them discreetly, a reward five times greater is given to the first than to the second: but then the first had five times the labour, and five times the danger of misemploying his trust, and would have incurred five times the punishment, if he had proved a worthless and wicked servant, and an unfaithful steward.

1. Therefore it becomes us to consider carefully ourselves, our situation and circumstances, and to see what peculiar advantages we enjoy, because we are peculiarly answerable to God for them, and because they produce peculiar duties. We have then the advantage of being born in a Christian country, which gives us a superiority over Mahometans and Idolators; we belong to a nation in which the Gospel is better understood and taught than in many parts of the Christian world, where we want no opportunities of learning our duty, and of practising it; many of us have the additional advantage of a good education, and of early instruction; and if we enter into ourselves, and examine our condition, we shall perhaps find some blessings relating to the body, the fortunes, or the understanding, which set us above several persons.

2. We

2. We ought to be thankful to God for these particular benefits; since unquestionably they are benefits. Knowledge is sweet to the mind, as light is to the eye; and the power of doing good and of shewing kindness, of instructing, or protecting, or relieving, affords a sublime and a rational pleasure; and a right use of superior talents will secure a superior reward in the next life; and upon these and other accounts we ought to receive our present good things from the hands of God with a thankful heart, and with sincere acknowledgments.

3. But then, to this gratitude for the gifts of Providence must be added peculiar care and caution to employ them wisely, to the honour of God, and to the advantage of mankind, a sense of the temptations to which they expose us, and of the danger of yielding to these temptations, and of perverting the things which were designed for our good.

Our Saviour, in his parable of the talents, represents a servant who is condemned, not for living in a riotous manner, for injuring his fellow-servants, and for wasting his Lord's money, but for hiding it, and putting it to no use; teaching us, that if mere indolence is an unpardonable fault in one who should be active,

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it must be far worse to be active in a wicked way, and to use the favours of Providence as incentives to vice, and instruments of mischief. If power, or high stations, or health, or knowledge, or bright abilities produce such vile effects, or even if they produce nothing good and commendable, the case of the possessor is worse than that of those bad men who are inferior to him in many respects, and who have not the same gifts and privileges to misemploy.

The Jews in our Saviour's time, who are so well described under the image of the deceitful and fruitless tree, had many singular advantages above others. They had not only a divine Law, and the admonitions of the Prophets, and a sacred history, and in it many bright examples of goodness, but the opportunity of receiving instruction from the Son of God himself. And surely every one who believes the Gospel would account it a great happiness if he could converse with Christ and with the Apostles, and apply to them upon all occasions. Our Saviour therefore says to his disciples; Blessed are your eyes, for they see; and your ears, for they hear. Many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear

hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them. But then he subjoins a caution to be used, and a danger to be shunned; Take heed what ye hear. Unto whomsoever much is given, of him much shall be required; and if he knew his Lord's will, and did it not, he shall be beaten with many stripes. And the sad consequence of the disobedient behaviour of the Jews was, Woe unto thee, Jerusalem; it shall be more tolerable in the day of judgment for Tyre and Sidon, for Sodom and Gomorrah than for thee.

We are accountable for all the benefits national or personal, which we possess. All the good examples which we have seen, and not imitated; all the opportunities of serving God which we have enjoyed, and neglected; all the instruction and advice which hath been offered to us, and offered in vain; all these will rise up in judgment against us. There are places where the Scriptures are shut up from the common people, and instead of the word of life, books of devotion are put into their hands which are full of fables and absurdities, of idolatry and superstition. The Scriptures here are open to every one, besides a variety of treatises containing good instruction; and yet there

there are too many who never look into them. There are places where Christians are not allowed publickly to serve God in spirit and in truth : we may assemble together as often as we think fit ; but any excuse serves to keep us away.

4. Lastly ; If we have a smaller measure of temporal and personal blessings, we ought not to hate or to envy those who have a greater share of them, nor to repine and be dissatisfied, but rather to set the conveniences against the inconveniences, and to consider that we are discharged from an heavier burden and a stricter account. I speak principally concerning the outward advantages and the situation in life. For as to the endowments of the mind, most persons in their own estimation have a sufficient share ; and the natural affection which we bear to ourselves guards us usually against any discontent of that kind. And as to piety and morality, every one hath it in his power to be as eminent as he will.

Perhaps, if it were put to our choice, and all things were duly weighed, it would be prudent to prefer a middle condition, as to fortunes and station, as a trust which may be most easily managed, and in which the least
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risque is run, both for this world, and for the next. A middle condition is what God plainly designed for his chosen people the Jews, giving them laws which had a natural tendency to keep them from the extremes of poverty and riches ; it is what Historians, Poets, Orators, and Philosophers have described as most eligible ; it is what wise men, Prophets and Apostles have recommended ; it is what we usually approve, in words, though not in deeds. For when opportunities offer to acquire wealth and power, they are seized, though commonly at the expence of leisure, peace and quiet ; and not uncommonly at the expence of honour and honesty.

But it is our duty, to set our hearts upon no particular condition, so as to be anxious about it ; to leave it to Providence, and submissively accepting our lot and our station, whatsoever it be, to be diligent in performing the offices which it requires. This is our business ; the rest belongs to God. The state which would best become us, and in which we could best behave ourselves, is one of those secret things, which He only sees who sees the hearts of men, and knows what change a change of circumstances would produce in them. The only way

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to obtain the condition which is most proper for us, is to desire it of God, with a resignation to his will; and then either he will give it us, or he hath given it already, and will continue it to us *.

The rich and the poor, say the Scriptures, meet together; the Lord is the maker and the

* Our Saviour says of the fig-trees in general: When the branch is yet tender and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is nigh. These therefore must have been the most common sort in Judæa. Now these trees could not have fruit before the summer was advanced, nor had they full-grown leaves at the time of the Passover.

The time when Christ sought fruit, was a little before the Passover, which was in March or April.

The summer months in Judæa seem to have been our May, June, and July.

But there was a sort of fig-tree which had two crops, the one early, the other late.

There were fig-trees which had fruit on them ten months in the year.

It must have been one of these sort of trees, from which Christ expected fruit.

There would therefore be no difficulty in the account, if St. Mark had not added; For the time of figs was not yet.

As Christ was journeying (*Matt. xxi. 19.*) he saw by the way-side *μία σκιά*, that is, *one single fig-tree*, which was of the forward kind, and which had leaves (for the time of common figs was not yet come, nor had the common fig-trees any leaves). It might therefore have been expected that it had fruit, because the fruit of that tree comes before the leaves. But he found it to be a barren tree which had no fruit.

father of them all; and regards them, not according to their stations, but according to their moral qualities. But as to this world, it is not so. The rich have many advantages of which the poor are deprived. To lessen this excessive disparity, and this grievous discouragement, it is highly fit that the children of the poor should have an opportunity, or a chance of bettering their hard condition. This is in some measure effected by our Charity-schools, in which they who are well-disposed receive such helps as will qualify them for useful and profitable employments. They may soon discern that the only sure way to thrive is obedience to their teachers and to their masters, civility, industry, emulation, sobriety, and honesty. And doubtless many there are and there have been, who by the advantage of this education have raised themselves above want and dependence, and by many ways have repaid their country for the care which she took of them.

They who have condemned Charity-schools, have also reproached the Clergy for being their chief advocates. We acknowledge the charge, and are not ashamed of the accusation. Indeed we lie under particular obligations to promote the support and the instruction of youth, because

we

we ourselves owe what we are to the liberality, or to the charity, call it which you please, of our pious ancestors and benefactors. For as these inferior seminaries are designed for the poorest of the people; so our more eminent public Schools, our Universities, and our Colleges were founded and endowed for a more liberal education, and were principally designed for those who were in a middle state between poverty and wealth. And to these kind assistances the far greater part of us, and of the other two learned professions, are indebted for our situation in life. So that our Saviour's admonition comes home to us: Go and do thou likewise.

S E R M O N XVI.

LUKE xviii. 14.

I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other : for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased, and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.

THUS our Saviour concludes and applies the well known Parable of the Pharisee and the Publican. He gives us the example of one, whose conceit corrupted some of his actions which might else have been commendable; and of another, who obtained the remission of his sins, because he sought it with meekness and contrition; setting thus in the strongest light the dangerous nature of pride, and the profitableness of humility.

Every one, who knows any thing of the New Testament, must know that the Pharisees stand condemned there as great sinners, and

that our Saviour absolutely required much more goodness from his followers than was to be found in them; which should be matter of fear to careless and disobedient Christians, and which must alarm them, if they consider what may be said in behalf of these men from the account which is given of them in Scripture, and in other ancient books.

The greatest sect of the Jews in the time of our Saviour, was that of the Pharisees, and in many respects it seems to have been the best also. The principal fault, in point of doctrine, belonging to it, was a zeal for the Traditions of the Elders. The Pharisees pretended that God had given to Moses, besides the written Law, an oral law, a law delivered by word of mouth, which had been preserved safe and sound by the same wise method, and transmitted down by hear-says from one generation to another. To this fantastical and imaginary Rule of life they paid more regard than to the written word of God, and made the Scriptures give way to it, when these two systems were at variance, and preferred their own wretched Doctors and Rabbins to Moses and the Prophets.

It is remarkable that in all this, the Papists have been the humble and the faithful imita-

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tors of the Pharisees, and have an oral law, and a set of traditions, which they value no less than the Gospel, and would compel all Christians to receive as a Rule of Faith absolutely necessary to salvation.

If we consider the ignorance and the corruption of the Jewish nation, in the time of our Saviour, we must acknowledge that the Pharisees and their disciples were by no means the worst and the most irreligious part of the people.

The Pharisees admitted the immortality of the soul, and a future state of retribution, and a divine assistance added to human endeavours: for which they deserved some praise, when we compare them with the sect of the Sadducees, who rejected these important doctrines; they spent much time in studying the Scriptures, and in teaching the people; they observed the ceremonial law with great exactness; they kept many fasts; they paid tythes of all, even of the smallest matters, and in doubtful cases; they gave much away in alms; and they made long and frequent prayers. In a word, they did many things which required so much labour, and care and self-denial, and were so contrary to the humour and taste of the gay and vicious

part of mankind, that it is hard to suppose a large sect of men submitting to the performance of such actions, unless they were influenced by religious motives, and desirous to recommend themselves to the favour of God.

If these persons were not proper objects of the divine mercy, who then, may it be said, can be saved? and what must become of those who take not half the pains to enter into the kingdom of heaven which these poor men seem to have taken to miss the way to it? Let it therefore be observed, that the bad character which is given in the Scriptures to the Pharisees, ought not to be extended to all who were of that sect. It is enough if the majority of them, or if the most eminent in station, power and authority were very wicked. There were, without question, several Pharisees, such as Nicodemus, such as St. Paul, men mistaken in many things, and carried into faults by the prevailing notions of the party, yet men of sincerity, and of virtuous dispositions, and desirous of pleasing God.

The rest were inexcusable, and what appearances soever of austerity and sanctity they put on, were dissemblers and hypocrites, full of pride, vain-glory, ostentation and covetousness; and

and insatiably fond of applause, respect, power and pre-eminence. They were much addicted to slander and calumny, to censoriousness and contempt of others; they were rash and uncharitable in their judgments; they justly deserved to be called an evil and adulterous generation, even on account of their frequent and scandalous marriages and divorces; they corrupted the word of God by their senseless traditions and perverse interpretations; they shamefully neglected the observation of the moral law, and the practice of justice, mercy and truth; they made long prayers, and gave alms for worldly ends, that they might impose upon silly, credulous, superstitious people; and they seem to have fasted often, that they might have a keener stomach to devour widows houses: and, what enhances their iniquity, is that they lived in that happy time when the Son of God was manifested in the flesh; they saw and heard those things which so many prophets and wise men would have rejoiced to see and hear; they beheld his beneficial miracles, and were not ignorant of his holy doctrines; and yet infatuated by a strange obstinacy, or instigated by interest, avarice, pride, cruelty, envy, malice, and other vile passions, they opposed, derided, and defamed

famed him, and were at last his betrayers and murderers.

If the case of the Pharisee, described in the parable, may raise in us a dread of the Christian religion, as requiring an higher degree of holiness than we can hope to acquire, the example of the Publican is adapted to allay such apprehensions, and to convince us that we serve not a severe and inexorable Master, but one who, though we offend him, is ready to receive us, when we return to our duty.

The Publicans were persons employed in collecting the revenues of the Roman Empire, which arose from taxes and tributes.

All the provinces of that empire were obliged to pay certain tributes, and as Judæa was then in subjection to it, many Publicans were then employed in gathering the taxes, of whom some were Gentiles and some Jews.

The Publicans were disliked in most places, particularly in Judæa: those Publicans especially who were Jews, gave great offence to their countrymen. It is said, that the Jews would not eat with a Jewish Publican, that they avoided him no less than they shunned the Gentiles, that they would make no marriages with

with any of his family, that they would not admit him into their synagogues, or receive his testimony as a witness to any fact.

They hated the Publicans thus, because they were uneasy under the government of the Romans, and paid them tribute unwillingly.

They hated the Jewish Publicans, as enemies to their own country and to their brethren, as contributing to the slavery of God's people, and as men who by their very office were obliged to converse and enter into society with the Gentiles, with profane and unclean persons, whom it was their duty to avoid.

They hated them, because they were indeed generally sharpers, extortioners, men of no honour and honesty, who enriched themselves by fraud, rapine, and oppression. Our Saviour intimates that they were people of no reputation, when he says, If ye love those that love you, what reward have ye? do not even the Publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do you more than others? do not even the Publicans the same? John the Baptist, when they repaired to him, gave them a caution which probably was necessary, to exact no more than what was appointed them: and though they were favoured and protected
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by the Government, yet even the Roman Law itself makes dishonourable mention of them.

Such a calling, you may think, should and would have been avoided by Jews who had any good and religious principles. But let us offer what may be alleged in excuse for such persons. Perhaps they had no other way to get their bread, and were entered into it betimes by their parents and friends, and were under contracts to serve the Roman government: and the calling, though it might expose them to some temptations, yet did not necessarily lead them into dishonesty. When they asked John the Baptist what they should do, to make God propitious to them, he did not tell them that they must quit their occupation, and betake themselves to another, but only said, Exact no more than that which is appointed you; which implied a concession that the calling was not of its own nature unlawful. And here we may observe the wisdom, not the human, but the divine wisdom of the Baptist, for he was a Prophet, and spake as the Spirit of God directed him. If he had been guided by mere human zeal, which so often inclines to excess, he would perhaps have ordered the Publicans and the Soldiers to quit their profession;

feſſion; but ſuch a general prohibition would have been attended with bad effects; for without receivers of the revenues, and without military men, human ſociety cannot ſubſiſt.

Zaccheus the Publican ſaid to Chriſt, Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken any thing from any man by falſe accuſation, I reſtore him four-fold. It appears not from theſe words that Zaccheus was conſcious to himſelf of having defrauded or oppreſſed any one: but as he might have done it undeſignedly, he ſays, Lord, I intend to give half of my goods to the poor; and if any man can ſhew that I ever exacted from him more than was due, I am ready to return him four-fold.

Every occupation, calling, and profeſſion is lawful, which is allowed by the civil government, exerciſed by perſons of reputation, and laying none under a neceſſity of violating any duty, any law of God. And yet thoſe callings which expoſe us to the feweſt temptations, and may be followed with the moſt peace of mind, and with the approbation of the wiſe and the good, muſt be owned to be moſt eligible. The ancient Chriſtians avoided and condemned the exerciſe of ſome employments, becauſe they

they thought them inseparably connected with sinful compliances, with idolatrous practices, with scandalous company, with lewdness, or with other vices. For this care and caution they deserve to be commended, and are proper patterns for our imitation. To enter into particulars upon this subject, is not necessary, and to decide peremptorily upon such cases, is difficult and disobliging, and therefore it seems best to deliver this reasonable advice and admonition in general terms.

The Publican in the parable is not represented as a righteous man, but as a repenting sinner: he was ashamed of his faults, and confessed them with sorrow and humility, and without question resolved with himself to avoid them for the time to come; and therefore his prayer was accepted of God.

Our Saviour's design in this parable was,

1. To condemn a censorious disposition, a groundless contempt, and bad opinion of others.
2. To correct those false notions of religion which lead men to overlook its principal duties.
3. To expose and reprove that part of self-love which makes us proud of our righteousness.

4. To

4. To recommend repentance and humility towards God as the first step to amendment.

5. Lastly, to caution us against all pride and conceit in general.

1. Our Lord in this parable condemns a censorious disposition.

I am not, says the Pharisee, as *other* men, or, as * *the rest* of men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this Publican. Whilst he is at prayers, and should be occupied in confessing his own sins, he cannot abstain from condemning another. His vanity immediately leads him to make a comparison between this man and himself, a comparison altogether to his own advantage: he scruples not to rank him amongst the worst of sinners, though he could not possibly know the disposition of his heart at that time; and thus even his devotion is uncharitable. When he saw the Publican come to the temple to pray, he ought to have supposed or hoped that he came with a due sense of his offences, and with honest intentions.

This was a fault to which the Jews in our Saviour's time were remarkably addicted, and therefore he frequently reprehends rashness, partiality, and inhumanity in judging others.

* ὡς οἱ λοιποὶ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου.

Concerning this malevolent temper we may observe, that it consists not in an abhorrence for sin, nor yet in openly blaming open vice and immorality, but in condemning many in general, or particularly such and such persons, when through ignorance of circumstances we are not qualified to pass a judgment upon them; in assuming to ourselves what belongs to God, and pronouncing how he shall deal with them; in concluding that those are great sinners who fall under great calamities, and in representing the same faults more or less favourably, according as we like or dislike those who commit them. Of such censoriousness our Lord observes, that it shall bring down a stricter judgment upon ourselves.

The censoriousness of which we are speaking, relates to men and to their moral character, which we ought to treat as candidly and as tenderly as we would have our own treated. As to opinions relating to religion, and maintained by Christians of various denominations, we have a natural right to judge freely of them, if we be duly qualified by understanding the subject; and we may express our dislike of all notions which have a bad tendency, and are contrary to truth and reason: but here we ought

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to distinguish between the opinions and the persons, and whilst we attack the former, we should spare the latter, and not charge them with holding consequences which they see not and admit not. As to men's abilities natural and acquired, their learning and their writings, we are also at liberty to form our judgments, if we have skill for it: nevertheless, since men's reputation in these things may often be connected with their temporal welfare, and with the peace and comfort of their mind, it is better to be too indulgent towards them than too severe; and it is what we should desire to be done to ourselves, if we were in their circumstances.

2. This parable was intended to correct those false notions of religion which lead men to overlook the principal duties of it.

The Pharisee, giving an account of himself, says that he was not unjust, or an extortioner, or an adulterer. Possibly he might be mistaken, and not altogether so free from all these faults as he imagined. But though he could affirm all this with truth, to abstain from these sins was not the whole of religion. He adds, as the completion of all, that he paid his tithes
 VOL. II. Y exactly,

exactly, and that he fasted twice in the week, which was more than the law required.

Our Lord hath not blamed the Pharisees for paying tithes even of the smallest matters : he calls it one of those things which ought not to be left undone, that is, which had a lower degree of goodness in them. Nor hath he censured their fasts, but the reason for which they kept them, and the confidence which they placed in them. If therefore the Pharisee found his frequent fasts subservient to religion, and conducing to make him a better man, he did well ; if they had no good effect upon his mind, they were of no use and value ; and if he submitted to them for worldly ends, from the world he was to expect his reward.

The Pharisees observed the ceremonial Law and the traditions with exactness, but they took no care to restrain their inordinate affections, to purify their heart from lust, from envy, from covetousness, from malice, from vain-glory, from an excessive love of the world ; they would not adhere to the cause of truth and virtue against the smallest of their temporal interests.

The Pharisee, in pleading his own merits, mentions either good works, or works which
had

had the external nature of goodness, as an abstaining from certain vices, justice in his dealings and scrupulous payment of all that the Law of God required. There have been persons who have talked more absurdly than this Pharisee, namely, they who have magnified faith so indiscreetly as to undervalue good works. Christian faith and Christian virtues are indeed inseparable; but yet faith and works, or believing and practising, may be in some manner distinguished in the mind; that is to say, you may consider believing separately from acting, and you may consider acting separately from believing. And if you view them in this manner, it must be owned that works without faith are better than faith without works, for this obvious reason, that moral actions, from what principle soever they flow, such as justice, charity, gratitude, affability, liberality, forgiveness of injuries, are of a social and diffusive nature, and others are the better for them: but a persuasion that we are in the favour of God, and a speculative belief of revealed religion, are of no advantage to any creature besides the possessor. If I am in distress, and a person pities and relieves me; let him be a Pagan, a Publican, a Jew, a Samaritan, a

Schismatic, a Heretic, he is my benefactor: if he gives me nothing, let his faith be ever so right, it will not feed and clothe me.

3. Our Saviour's design in this parable was to expose and reprove that part of self-love which makes men proud of their righteousness.

The Pharisee's prayer discovered the disposition of his mind. He begins it indeed with an acknowledgment of God's assistance: God, I thank thee. But this seems to be thrown out for fashion's sake; it being scarcely possible that a man can have a due sense of his weakness without the divine support, and be lifted up with notions of his own performances. We may suppose that he did not much regard what he said, when he returned thanks to God that he was a good man, but that his chief design was to boast of his uncommon piety. His address to God is drawn up in a form of thanksgiving, and as if he had no sins to confess, and was in no danger of falling into any for the future, and wanted no improvement of any kind, he makes no request for pardon and support, and seems to be talking with himself rather than with his Maker, and blessing himself rather than blessing God.

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That he may set his good works in the most favourable light and the most advantageous view, he takes care not to compare his practice with his duty. If he had done so, his conscience must have reminded him of several defects. But he chooses an easier method of examining himself, and compares his own with the actions of wicked men, that he may appear to be righteous, because he is not so bad as they are.

Many are the evil consequences of this spiritual vanity and religious pride, which is commonly compounded of self-conceit, ignorance, folly, ingratitude, and uncharitableness; and which our Lord warned his hearers to avoid, because it was a prevailing sin amongst the Jews.

Some advantages, which should have made them better men, contributed to lead them into it. Their Law which separated them from other people, and the peculiar favours which they had received from God, produced in them unsuitable effects, a national pride, a high conceit of themselves, a contempt and a bad opinion of others.

Many ceremonies were enjoined by the Law; and the having a trifling and superstitious turn

of mind, added to the burden of the ritual law numerous institutions and inventions of their own, and were not a little proud of the obedience which they paid to them.

4. Our Saviour in this parable recommends repentance and humility towards God as the first step to amendment.

The Publican, says he, stood afar off, and durst not lift up his eyes to heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner: and he returned home, justified rather than the other.

If, when he returned home, he had returned to those faults which he had acknowledged, he had been an hypocrite too, as well as the Pharisee, though of another kind: but his humility, and his shame and sorrow were sincere, and accompanied, it is to be supposed, with amendment of life.

5. Lastly, the design of our Lord was to caution us against all pride in general. The parable indeed sets before us only one kind of pride, a groundless conceit of our own religious merits; but then the moral and application are unlimited, and seem to relate to all sorts of arrogance.

Spiritual

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Spiritual pride is not common amongst reasonable men. It seems to belong more particularly to those who are far gone in enthusiasm, or very ignorant of the nature of true religion, and of its genuine effects : and upon such persons advice and instruction are usually thrown away. If the light that is in a man be darkness, how great is that darkness ! and if reason itself be shut out, how can reasoning have any influence ?

But other sorts of pride are too frequent, and these words are directed against all arrogance : Every one that exalteth himself shall be abased. He will be abased by his own vanity, which blinds those whom it infects, and either finds or makes them fools, and draws them into many errors and indiscretions pernicious to their worldly interests. He will be abased by men, who detest over-bearing insolence, if not in themselves, yet always in others, and seldom miss any fair opportunity of humbling such vainglorious persons. He will be abased in the sight of God, who is constantly represented in Scripture as abhorring the proud ; for pride, of whatsoever kind it be, is a direct offence against God ; it is to forget, or practically to deny that we receive every thing from him,

all the advantages of body, mind, birth, reputation and fortunes which we possess. Every one that exalteth himself shall be abased, and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.

SERMON XVII.

MATTH. xiii. 8.

But other fell into good ground, and brought forth fruit, some an hundred fold, some sixty fold, some thirty fold.

THE parable of the sower was designed by our Saviour to represent the different effects which his doctrine then had upon different persons, and which religion and the word of God hath and will have in all times and places.

But before we consider the several persons described in the parable, it is well worthy of our observation to consider how the distinct operations of divine assistance, and of human liberty, may fairly and naturally be inferred from it.

Revealed religion is here represented as good seed sown in the ground by the Husbandman. God, or our Saviour Jesus Christ, is the Husbandman.

bandman. Revealed religion is the gift of God : of ourselves we could never have discovered it. It is a restoration of natural religion to an ignorant and a wicked world, which had in a manner lost all due apprehensions, all just and practical notions of God, of duty, of future rewards and punishments : it is also an improvement of natural religion, containing new diffuatives from wickedness, and new motives to amendment and to righteousness.

In one sense all that we have is derived from God, who gave us our souls and our bodies, our natural qualities and affections ; most justly therefore in this sense may we ascribe to our great Author all that we are and all that belongs to us, except our sins. But amongst other good gifts he imparted to us self-motion, power, activity and liberty ; and He who made us without ourselves cannot save us without ourselves, without our own concurrence and co-operation, and the free exertion of our natural powers. All this is implied plainly enough in the parable of the sower. Human art and human industry cannot make the seeds which are sown, or the ground into which they are cast ; these are created of God : but the soil must be prepared and cultivated by human labour,

labour, or else no fruit will grow in it. So as to the spiritual harvest, religion is the gift of God, and the human understanding is the gift of God: but the application of the heart and mind to the word and to the will of God is free and voluntary.

In this parable our Saviour hath described four sorts of hearers of the word.

The first sort are thus described: Some seeds fell by the way-side, and they were trodden down, and the fowls came and devoured them up. That is, says our Lord, when any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not, that is to say, regardeth it not, then cometh the Wicked One, the Devil, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart, lest he should believe, and be saved: this is he which received the seed by the way side.

When any one heareth the word, and understandeth it not. Our Saviour cannot here intend to signify that his word ever becomes unprofitable to any persons, either through the natural weakness of their understanding which renders them unable to discern his mind; or through the darkness or obscurity of the word preached; since then the blame would fall, not upon

upon the hearers, whose ignorance would be unavoidable and invincible, but upon the Preacher, who delivered it so darkly, or who offered it to men incapable of receiving it. But the word which we translate, *to understand*, means in this and in some other places, to consider a thing, and lay it to heart, with an intention to make a right use of it.

The Devil is here said to snatch the word away from such persons, lest they should profit by it. The entrance of evil into the world is ascribed to the Devil, as to the first cause of it, and he is called the *Evil One*, by way of eminence, as being the first rebel against God and goodness. When it is said, that the Devil enters into the heart of a sinner, it is an Hebrew way of speaking, which is not to be taken too rigorously, and pressed too far; for the Devil is said to do whatsoever is executed and performed by the unruly lusts of men, which are accounted as his instruments. The Gospel accommodates itself in style and phrase to the Jewish conceptions and forms of speech; but then it takes care to ascribe no such power and prevalence to the Devil as shall lay the tempted person under a necessity of sinning; and it always supposes that the inducements and the

assist-

assurances to well-doing are far stronger than the incentives and instigations to evil, if a man will act like a rational creature, and use his best endeavours, and exert his own powers: so that whether it be an evil spirit, or whether it be only an evil disposition in the man himself, which prompts him to iniquity, it is all one, since he ought to repel and reject such assaults and temptations, and sins entirely by his own choice and fault.

When a man heareth the word and regardeth it not, then cometh the Evil one and taketh it away. The meaning seems to be no more than this; He who hath no consideration, no sober and serious and settled respect for religion, when his duty is propounded to him, gives no attention to it; it makes no impression upon him; his own vicious habits, and the bad example, and the contagious society of wicked persons, who are the children of the wicked One, are more prevalent than the word of God, and soon blot out the faint and floating remembrance of it; the man goes on in his thoughtless iniquity, and steadily pursues his evil courses. This is he who received seed by the way-side.

Seed

Seed falling upon the hard highway cannot possibly take root, and bring forth fruit. It lies exposed and unguarded, the sun burns it, the frost kills it, the wind disperses it, the rain washes it away, the foot of the passenger and of the beast tramples and crushes it, the birds of the air pick it up and eat it. Sad image and melancholy representation of the worst sort of sinners. These are the persons, who, as our Saviour says, have eyes, and see not, ears, and hear not, and whose hearts are hardened like a rock; these are they to whom he would not explain his parables, because they were unworthy of it, and because instruction would have been thrown away upon them; these are they, who when John the Baptist made his appearance with austere severity, said he was mad; and when Christ conversed, and taught with mild condescension, said he was a drunkard, a glutton, and a keeper of bad company. They disliked the doctrines, and therefore they were resolved to find fault with the teachers. Such are those who have entered betimes and continued long in the service of the Devil, who are slaves to vices and to bad habits, who have extinguished all reason, reflection, and natural conscience, and whom no ordinary methods can

reclaim.

reclaim. The word is preached to them; and they trample it under foot, treat it with the utmost scorn and contempt, and revile and ridicule those who offer them good advice. They lie out of the reach of persuasion and instruction, and nothing less than some grievous calamity can awaken them. But from their deplorable condition others may take due warning, lest by departing from their duty, and neglecting a timely reformation, they should, through the deceitfulness of sin, arrive to such a hardened state: and this seems to be the only use for which these incorrigible offenders serve in this world: they stand forth, not as marks and friendly lights to guide and direct the passenger, but as examples to be shunned, and signals of danger and death to those who shall approach them.

The next sort of hearers, as they are less wicked, so they are more frequent, and are set forth to us in the parable under the image of stony ground. Some seed fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth, and forthwith they sprang up; but because they had no deepness of earth, when the sun was up, they were scorched, and because they had not root, they withered away. Now he that received

received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it, and for a time believeth. Yet he hath not root in himself, but dureth for a while; for when tribulation, or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended.

These are persons who have conscience, reason and reflection, who can discern the amiable and the profitable nature of religion, and the folly and danger of vice, who can sometimes give attention to the word of God, approve it as right and fit, speak and think honourably of it, and of those who practise it, and even entertain purposes of acting suitably to it; but they have no steadiness, resolution, and perseverance, and so are not proof against trials and temptations. They are such as are elegantly described in the prophet Ezekiel; Son of man, says God to the prophet, the children of thy people come unto thee, and they sit before thee as my people, and they hear thy words, but they will not do them: for with their mouth they shew much love, but their heart goeth after their covetousness. And lo, thou art unto

* Hard are the ways of truth, and rough to walk,
Smooth on the tongue discours'd, pleasing to th' ear,
And tuneable as silvan pipe or song. *Milton, Par. Reg. l. 478.*

them

them as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument ; for they hear thy words, but they do them not. Moral precepts and religious arguments appear fair and lovely in idea, but are found grievous in practice and execution ; and the paths of righteousness, which make a fine landscape in description, are rough, steep, and tedious to ascend. Such is the effect of religion upon those who have some taste and natural discernment, but no steady love of goodness. They are such as our Saviour represents in another place under the image of the man who built his house upon the sand, and the rain and the wind beat upon it, and the storm blew it down, and the flood swept it away. They are like the young man who came to Christ offering to do any thing that should be required of him ; but when Christ would have favoured and honoured him so far as even to take him for a companion and disciple if he would relinquish his possessions, he went away sorrowful. Our Saviour and his Apostles had many such half-disciples and imperfect converts, sincere perhaps at the first, but weak and unsteady, and he had such wavering persons in view,

when he spake this parable of the sower. When the Gospel was first preached, many embraced it, and continued in it for a time, whilst the course of things ran tolerably smooth: but when persecution was to be endured, they departed and fell away. In the morning, whilst the refreshing dew was upon the earth, the divine seed suffered no detriment, though lodged in stony ground; but when the heat increased and the burning sun shone upon it, it withered and died.

We live not now in times of such kind of distress, and so are not put to the same trial: but if we were in the very same condition, we may be morally certain that a great apostasy would ensue, and that many nominal Christians would forsake their religion. To judge whether a man would be faithful under great trials, it is to be considered, whether he be found faithful under smaller experiments of his integrity and resolution. There are, from without, two everlasting temptations in all times and places, namely loss and gain, and by the behaviour of a person under trials of these kinds, a tolerable judgment may be formed of his disposition. If he will part with nothing and
endure

endure no inconvenience to do that which he knows to be right, or if he will not scruple to obtain worldly advantages by sordid, fraudulent, violent, and iniquitous methods, he can be no true disciple of Christ.

The third sort of hearers mentioned in the parable, who are by far the most numerous, are those gay, luxurious, dissipated, or worldly-minded persons, who are set forth to us under the image of ground over-run with weeds and thorns.

Some seed fell among thorns, and the thorns sprang up and choked them. He that received seed among the thorns, is he that heareth the word, and the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the pleasures of this life, and the lusts of other things, entering in, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful.

To this class of people religion is presented and propounded, and they assent to it, and receive it, and call themselves Christians; but many things arise between them and their duty, many avocations and impediments, which prevent the word of God from having a due effect upon their hearts, and they are here enumerated.

Such are, in the first place, the cares of this life, which when they are admitted and nourished and encouraged, seize upon the whole man, and so fill the head and so occupy the hours, that the attention is entirely fixed on worldly affairs, and no leisure is allowed for concerns of the spiritual kind; and as no person can bear the toil and fatigue of being always contriving, projecting, labouring, and plodding, and some amusement must intervene, the times for recreation are with such persons the times when other Christians are attending the public worship of God, or meditating on things sacred and serious at home. And thus religious considerations are totally banished, and not permitted to have even the smallest intervals, and then the man may be pronounced to be dead to God and to Christ, and alive only to the world.

The deceitfulness of riches is here represented as having the same bad effect. When the love of wealth is predominant and engrosses the affections, it produces an eagerness to acquire it, a proud trust and confidence in it, a settled resolution to preserve and increase it by any methods, and in defiance of honesty and humanity, and an esteem or contempt of other persons,

persons, according as they are rich or poor ; and then Mammon alone is worshipped, and the love of God is expelled from the heart.

The pleasures of life are another source of evil, another cause why the word of God can produce no good effect upon the minds and manners of men ; indeed they are the most common, the most deceitful, the most prevalent, and the most pernicious of all temptations. They are those pleasures of life, which are called the works of the flesh, as intemperance, and debauchery of every kind, which depress and sink the soul in sensuality, and entirely alienate it from God and goodness ; they are also those pleasures which though they are not directly and essentially vicious, yet are inlets and incentives to vice, such as the conveniences of life, and the objects agreeable to the senses, when they are too studiously sought after and collected, and too much indulged, a circle of perpetual amusements, and an immoderate pursuit of vain diversions. These are bad instructors, which teach men to banish serious thoughts, to neglect their duty to God, and to their neighbour, and even their own calling, and their private concerns, and their tem-

poral welfare, to live in perpetual dissipation, to connect themselves with loose and profligate persons, and to run into expences which they cannot afford; and hence arise temptations to a sad variety of follies and vices, the portion of those who are lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God. To this our Saviour adds, the lusting after other things, namely desires of magnificence and splendor, of flattery and popular applause, of power and pre-eminence, and, in a word, immoderate affections for any thing that is temporal and transitory.

From this melancholy scene presented to us in the review of persons deaf to the voice of Reason and to the calls of the Gospel, seeking their own destruction, and walking in thoughtless unconcern, till darkness overwhelms them, let us turn our consideration to the last sort of hearers mentioned with applause by our Saviour, and described under the similitude of good ground. Other seed fell into good ground, and brought forth fruit, some an hundred fold, some sixty fold, some thirty fold. He that received seed into the good ground, is he that heareth the word, and understandeth it, and receiveth it into a good and honest heart, which also beareth

beareth fruit with patience, and bringeth forth, some an hundred fold, some thirty, some sixty.

In this parable there is a beautiful gradation, from the bad to the good*. The seed which fell on the high-way comes not up at all; the seed upon stony ground comes up, but soon withereth away; the seed sown amongst thorns springs up and grows, but bears no fruit; the seed sown in good ground brings forth fruit in its season, but yet in various degrees, and much more plentifully in some soils than in others.

Ground which disappointeth not the sower, and bringeth forth fruit in its season, is natu-

* An old Commentator (Theophylact) expounding this parable, says, See how small a number there is of good men, and how few are saved, since only a fourth part of the seed was preserved. His remark is not just, but is foreign from the purpose, as may easily be shewed. In this parable of the Sower, there are three classes of bad men, and one of good: In the parable of the talents, there are two good servants, and one bad; and in the parable of the virgins, half are wise, and half foolish. So, if we follow such methods of expounding, we must conclude from the first of these parables, there are three times more bad than good men; from the second, that there are twice more good than bad; and from the third, that the good and the bad are equal in number. I mention this, chiefly for the sake of observing to you, that in the interpretation of parables, care should be taken not to overstrain them, but to distinguish those parts which are merely ornamental from those which are moral and instructive.

rally good, and is improved by culture. The heart of every well-disposed person is such. God hath given to all of us abilities, and power to exert them; he hath also to us Christians superadded his revealed will in the Gospel, and what aid is necessary, that he is ever ready to bestow: but a man must put forth his own strength, and seek out and work out his own salvation. The persons therefore here described, act like rational creatures, they have a love of knowledge and of goodness, and a desire to make improvements in both. Thence they are disposed to inquire into themselves and their duty, and opportunities for this are never wanting; morality and revealed religion lie within their reach, and they may read or hear what God requires from them. They hear the word, and understand it, says our Lord, they lay it to heart, and call it to mind, they meditate upon the benefits arising from it, the danger of neglecting it, the reasonable and amiable nature of it, the dangers, inconveniences and temptations which may arise and assault them, the proper methods of shunning or resisting them, and the wisdom of preferring eternal life to all other considerations. Such is the fair foundation

tion laid for a regular course of life, and an honest discharge of Christian duties.

Some difficulties will occur, some trials will arise from within and from without, some spots and blemishes, some faults and defects will always accompany men in their religious progress; but they who have an honest mind, and an habitual probity, if they fall, yet rise again, if they transgress, they repent, and in the main are obedient and dutiful, human weaknesses excepted. And this is patience and perseverance, which are mentioned as the distinguishing marks of those who receive the word of God and keep it.

Goodness and wickedness seem not to consist in a fixed and determinate number of right or wrong actions. Men are good or bad in an infinite variety of degrees; and therefore according to the law of proportions, and the result of causes and effects, their future condition must needs be infinitely various, either as to gain or loss, as to recompense or correction. What is revealed to us concerning it, is only in gross and in general, and it is impossible for us in the present state to form a just and complete notion of it. None but God, all-wise, all-powerful, and perfectly just and good, is capable of dispensing

dispensing these retributions, and of allotting to each of his creatures his proper situation, and his due measure and proportion of elevation or depression, of joy or sorrow, of reward or punishment, according to his deeds, and to the dispositions which he has contracted in the days of his mortality. Therefore, in general, it behoves us above all things to be wise and cautious, in this our time of trial and probation, and to secure to ourselves a portion amongst those faithful servants of Christ, whose good deeds shall be found to preponderate, and to surpass their transgressions, and thus to qualify ourselves for a state of peace and rest in some of the happy mansions allotted to the righteous.

Good persons are here described by our Saviour as being so in various degrees, some twice and some thrice better than others, who yet may be called good also. This considerable difference between righteous persons arises from two causes: first, it arises from an inequality between them to which they do not contribute, from a difference of natural abilities, and of opportunities to receive improvement, and to exert themselves by doing or suffering. This diversity of talents is the free gift of God, which he dispenses according to his own pleasure, yet there

is no partiality in all this; since it is suitable to perfect wisdom and goodness to make a great variety of beings of different ranks and capacities, and to place them accordingly higher or lower both in this world and in the next. But to every one who hath improved his talents, whether they were two, or whether they were ten, it will be said; Well done, good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord. He who enters into the joy of his Lord, will be rewarded to the full extent of his views and capacity; and that is sufficient to justify the goodness of the Lord, and to secure the happiness of the servant.

But, secondly, the difference between two righteous persons arises more commonly and usually, not from their natural abilities, or their situation in life, but purely from themselves, and their own endeavours, from the care, caution, assiduity, zeal, and industry, exerted more or less in things pertaining to morality and religion: and in this case, a difference of retribution is highly reasonable. It is fit in the nature of things, that the event should be proportionable to the pains, that no good deed should go unnoticed and unrewarded, but yet that he who soweth sparingly should

reap

reap sparingly; and he who soweth plenteously should reap plenteously, that some should be saved, scarcely and with difficulty, like a brand plucked out of the fire, and others should receive a far more exceeding and abundant weight of glory.

How can we better close our remarks on this subject, than with the serious and solemn admonition with which our Saviour concludes; He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.

Which is, as if our Lord had said; What I have delivered to you, is not a discourse to amuse and entertain you, not a point of curiosity and speculation, not an ordinary and indifferent affair, which will be of small consequence to you, whether you attend to it or disregard it, whether you recollect it, or forget it. It is of unspeakable importance, and nothing less than your eternal happiness or misery depends upon it. As you make a good or a bad use of my exhortations and instructions, you will be acquitted or condemned when I come to judgment. Therefore, Be wise, and Remember.

S E R M O N XVIII.

LUKE xvi. 31.

If they hear not Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.

OUR Lord tells us that there was a certain rich man, who was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day. He died, and went into a state of punishment; and seeing Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom, he intreated him to send Lazarus, that he might dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool his tongue. Abraham replies that this cannot be done. Remember, son, says he, that thou in thy life-time receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented.

I. There was a man, says our Lord, who had great riches; consequently he had leisure hours

hours to spend in the study of religious truths, and of the duties incumbent on a person of his rank; he had pressing motives to gratitude towards God, who had bestowed so many temporal blessings upon him; he had power and opportunity of doing considerable service to the public, of encouraging virtue by the authority and influence of his example, of shewing kindness to the unhappy, of being a father to the fatherless, a defence to the oppressed, a rewarder of industry, a friend and patron to modest merit. What use did he make of these advantages? Why truly, the history of his life briefly summed up, was, that he ate, and drank, and dressed himself. A poor man, of his own nation, reduced to the utmost distress, lay at his door. Did he assist him? We may suppose that he did not; for it is not said that he took any notice of him, but the contrary seems rather to be intimated through the whole parable. Thus he was one who lived to himself, and did no good to others: his heart was set upon worldly objects, and he removed religion far from his thoughts.

II. The character here drawn of the rich man is not uncommon. What is said of him in the Parable, is true in another sense: He
hath

hath many brethren. They behave themselves like him ; they kill not, perhaps, they defraud not, they use no scandalous methods to increase their wealth ; there are several crimes which they commit not, either because they lie under no provocations to commit them, or because they fear the laws of their country, or because they would avoid ignominy and shame, or because they are too indolent, or too busy. But then they have no desire to excel in any virtue, The business of their lives is to divert themselves, to gratify their senses, to seek out new pleasures and amusements, and thus to waste their days, regardless of God, and useless to mankind.

It was for a warning to all such, that our Lord spake this parable. He sets before them the example of this man, who had received his good things, and who taking no care to employ them in a proper manner, goes into a state of punishment. Hence they may learn that if God hath committed much to them, he hath much to require from them, and that when they come to give an account of themselves to him, it will be no excuse to be able to say that they are free from this or that fault, that they have not been as wicked as many others,

others, that they have not committed the evil which lay in their power. The question will be, What good they have done, and what returns they have made to God for all the blessings which he hath conferred upon them?

III. Of the rich man it is said expressly, that he fared sumptuously every day. This is the character of a glutton; and hence it may be supposed, that as extreme want produced the diseases which sent poor Lazarus out of the world; so what is called *living well* had the same effect upon the rich man, and helped to shorten his days.

Here then it will not be improper to take occasion to recommend to you temperance and abstinence, abstinence exercised with discretion, and free from superstitious and injudicious austerities.

There is, as we may not improperly call it, a perpetual fast, to which we are obliged, as rational creatures and as Christians, namely, a fast from all intemperate affections, turbulent passions, and irregular practices. But there is also an abstinence at particular times from the lawful pleasures of life; and the fitness of such a conduct might easily be proved even upon the principles of human reason, or common sense.

I explain

I explain myself by a few instances: your own thoughts may suggest more.

A person in health and in good circumstances hath food of various kinds at command. But such is the instability of human affairs, that he may be reduced to a morsel of bread. It is expedient therefore for him at certain times to take up with such spare and plain diet as sufficeth to remove pain, and to satisfy the cravings of the body. He will be better able to shift for himself upon any turn of fortune. I need not add that such abstinence will conduce to preserve his health. No one, I presume, will deny it.

Such a person, it may be, hath various diversions and entertainments at command, and may repair to them as often as he thinks fit. But many accidents may deprive him at a stroke of all these beloved amusements. Let him learn then to live without them, by shunning them more frequently whilst they are in his reach.

Such a person may usually have variety of company abroad and at home. But various events may reduce him to solitude. Let him then learn before-hand to bear solitude at certain times, to converse with sacred and with useful books, with his Maker, and with his own soul;

and think himself in good company whilst he is thus engaged.

Whosoever practiseth such abstinence, upon the principles above-mentioned, may be said to keep a moral and philosophical fast: but if what he thus saves in his expences he gives to the needy and the deserving, then, and not till then, he converts his rational into a truly religious and Christian fast.

IV. We may observe that our Lord, both in this parable, and in other discourses, mentions the great dangers which attend wealth and power, and worldly prosperity, and declares it to be difficult for those, who enjoy all these things, to acquire and to preserve the virtues necessary to their Salvation. He observes that the Gospel would be preached in vain to such persons, that either they would not receive it, or, if they did, would not act conformably to it. As when seed falls amongst thorns, the thorns spring up and choke it; so, says Christ, when the word of God is preached to the rich, the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it becometh unfruitful. When the young man came to him, and seemed sincerely desirous of receiving instruction, and of performing any action that might

might recommend him to God's favour, the sudden answer, If thou wilt be perfect, sell that thou hast, and give it to the poor, and follow me, quite disconcerted him, because he had great possessions; and he went away sorrowful. Upon which our Lord observed that it was next to impossible for a rich man to be his disciple.

So it is: The great and wealthy are exposed to various temptations. Riches are often attended with pride, insolence, indifference for religion, cares about the present, and carelessness about the future state, voluptuousness, intemperance, contempt and neglect of the poor, and the spirit of oppression, vices which lead to perdition.

If this be true, riches, it may be said, seem to be rather a curse than an advantage. How then shall we reconcile this with those declarations in the Scriptures that even wealth and worldly prosperity are blessings of God? Very easily, if we consider these two things.

First, A wealthy state is exposed to many temptations; but there is no state free from them. Whatsoever our condition be, if we entertain good dispositions, we want neither power nor opportunities to serve God, and re-

commend ourselves to his favour; and if we indulge evil inclinations, we shall never fail of objects enticing us to sin.

A state of worldly happiness may be accounted dangerous for the reasons above mentioned. Let us take a state of poverty, and see whether that have not its temptations also.

Poverty often makes a man envy his superiors, and hate and slander them, raises in him restless discontent and resentment, and unbecoming thoughts of divine Providence, and leads him into base or violent practices, to mend his condition.

Let us even take a state between poverty and riches, a state the least exposed to inconvenience and danger, and we shall find that as ill an use is often made of that as of any other. Many and many persons there are, to whom this desirable lot is fallen, happy if they knew their own happiness, who are so ungrateful as to think that Providence hath not given them enough, who look with repining uneasiness at those above them, and consider not how many are beneath them, who placed between indigence and superfluity, partake of the vices to which each of those stations incline us, who
are

are regardless of religion and virtue, and of the improvement of their minds, but very industrious and careful about the things of this life, about rising, as they call it, in the world, as if they were born for nothing else, and as if God had not set before them better objects to occupy their thoughts and their views.

Thus if an exalted station be surrounded with temptations, yet there is no station secured from them, and therefore no blessing which a perverse mind may not abuse, and no affliction which shall be able to correct and amend it. The rich man might have been as poor as Lazarus, and not the more virtuous and religious. It must indeed be confessed that plenty and prosperity expose us to many dangers. Therefore let the advantages of such a state be considered and set against the perils to which it lies open. To possess riches, and not to be enslaved to them, to be just when acts of iniquity may be committed with impunity, and would be excused or even applauded by flattery, to be humble and condescending in the midst of invitations to pride and insolence, to be regular and temperate when the opposite vices might be indulged without restraint, to love and serve God, when the World offers many

objects to call off the affections from him, to have much power to do good, and to do good to the utmost of that power, this is virtue put to the trial, and obtaining a glorious conquest. Peace of mind, respect and reputation here, and eternal happiness hereafter, are the rewards of such a behaviour.

This might have been the case of the rich man in the parable, who is represented as situated by divine Providence in such a condition, that he might have been happy in both worlds. God gave him large possessions; and if he had been an example of piety, as he was of prosperity, if he had not meanly confined his good things to his own use, but endeavoured to make others also happy and virtuous, he might have passed his days agreeably, and enjoyed with moderation, which is the only way of enjoying, the rational comforts of life; he had died in peace, after he had lived in credit and honour, and had gone to a happier place, and not to receive the recompense due to his evil deeds.

V. Our Lord, that he might teach those who are in a low state to be contented with it, and reconcile them to poverty, if poverty were their portion, and persuade them to bear afflictions with patience, hath set before them in the person

son of Lazarus a man extremely unhappy in the eye of the world, and in as great distress as human nature can well undergo. Yet this very poor man was a good man, and in the favour of God, and was received after death into happy mansions.

The difference between him and the rich man was as wide as could be conceived. One laboured under a wretched variety of calamities, was afflicted with sickness and pain, and had neither food, nor house, nor friends, nor any to take pity of him: the other was at ease, and knew no sorrows and disappointments. But how quickly did this difference cease! And it came to pass that the beggar died—the rich man also died, and was buried. Both of them have soon run their appointed course; their days are passed as a shadow, as a tale that is told. Thus the hours of our life, and the good and evil which they bring along with them, hasten away; the sorrows and afflictions of men, their joys and pleasures are soon ended, and become as though they had never been.

These are truths to which none of us are strangers; they are well known, and little considered. Serious reflections upon them would teach us to think and act like immortal beings,

to extend our hopes and desires beyond the present scene which will disappear so soon, and to prepare for the eternal state into which we are entering; they would teach us to be patient and resigned under calamities which can be of no long continuance, and which may in the event prove the greatest blessing that God could have bestowed upon us. Instead of repining at our circumstances, if they be not such as we should choose for ourselves, we ought to consider that if we have not some advantages which we fancy we should find in a higher or happier state, we have not also its inconveniences and dangers; that all these differences are in a manner for a moment, and that we must soon appear before Him, who will reward every one according to his works, who will bestow various degrees of honour and felicity upon his servants, amongst whom it is reasonable to suppose that they shall not be placed lowest, who having received the fewest temporal blessings from him, yet constantly retained a sincere love towards him, and an unshaken reliance upon him, patiently expecting that all should be made up to them in a future state.

VI. By the example of the rich man our Lord sets before us the fatal issue of a wicked life.

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life. He who dwelt at his ease, is delivered over to remorse, sorrow and pain. The remembrance of his former happiness makes his present state more wretched, whilst he considers what he is, and what he was, and looks back to those days which are gone, and cannot return again.

And to complete his misery, this cruel reflection must arise in his mind, that by his own fault he had brought himself into that sad state, that whilst he lived on the earth he might have been both happy and virtuous at the same time, that he had by the greatest folly chosen rather to be ungrateful to God, and disobedient to his just and reasonable laws, that he was fallen into evils from which he might once have easily secured himself, that he had rejected the opportunities of working out his salvation which had so frequently offered themselves to him, and of breaking off his sins by a timely repentance.

Thus it is that our Saviour, who knew what was in man, and what arguments were most proper to work upon his rebellious heart, that he might deter us from sin, shews us its sad consequences, and sets before us those scenes of horror, to awaken thoughtless and stubborn offenders, to give them a sense of their danger, and by raising their fear, to compel them to those

those duties, which, if they acted like reasonable creatures, they would make their choice and their chief delight.

VII. Lazarus is here said to be carried by the Angels to a place of happiness, called Abraham's bosom, that is to a great feast, where he sits next to Abraham, he who when he lived below, lay upon the ground at the rich man's door; and through the whole parable, the invisible state after death is described by images borrowed from the present life, and from the objects of our senses, and should not be taken according to the letter.

The generality of the Jews in our Saviour's time believed the soul's immortality, and rewards and punishments when this life was ended. They had collected their notions of these things, partly from ancient tradition, partly from some facts and intimations contained in the Old Testament, partly from the light of reason, and partly from conversation with the Greeks, and from Pagan authors. Our Saviour here accommodates himself to their common notions and received ways of speech, which answered his intention, namely, to confirm them still more in the belief of a state of retribution.

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The doctrine of future rewards and punishments, in general and at large, is all that we can learn from this parable; for we must not think to draw any certain consequences from particular circumstances mentioned in it, which may be purely ornamental, for any thing that we can prove to the contrary. The parable intimates that there is a state of happiness or misery after death and before the resurrection; but there are other passages of Scripture which seem to be more conclusive for the happiness of the good in their state of separation from the body, than this popular image of Lazarus placed in Abraham's bosom; as for example, St. Paul's wish to be absent from the body, and present with the Lord.

VIII. Lastly, Abraham declares that there was no reason for which Lazarus could be sent to the rich man's brethren, to convert them, because they had Moses and the Prophets, whom they might hear; he adds also, that it would be to no purpose; for, says he, if they hear not Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.

This is a point which deserves particular consideration, for it seems to contain a very
 strange

strange assertion, which we hardly can believe. But much of the apparent difficulty will be removed, if we duly observe these two things.

First, the Parables of our Saviour are very often prophecies, and these words before us are a prophecy declaring how the Jews would behave themselves; as the event fully shewed.

Secondly, To deter men from wickedness, the Scriptures frequently use very strong, figurative, and lively expressions concerning the dangerous nature of bad habits, representing them as incurable, and describe the difficulties of amendment as mere impossibilities; in all which places less is to be understood than the words naturally and literally imply.

1. The Jews had Moses and the Prophets, but would not hear them, so as to observe their moral precepts. This disobedience arose not from an unbelief of revealed religion; for they acknowledged the divine authority and the miracles of Moses and the Prophets. Indeed, they had not seen those miracles; they only knew them by the testimony of former ages. Therefore it might be supposed that miracles wrought before their eyes would have a more powerful effect upon them.

This

This evidence was granted to them: Christ gave them daily proofs of his authority, by healing all manner of diseases, and by many other wonderful works; yet it did not move them.

But of all miracles the resurrection of a dead person seems the most striking, and the most likely to prevail even upon a stubborn mind. If Lazarus would return from the grave, and testify unto them, they would surely repent. This also was done to convince them. Christ raised a man to life, and a man whose name was Lazarus; and the consequence was that they consulted to put to death both Christ and Lazarus. After this, Christ himself arose from the grave, and his Apostles restored some dead persons to life; and yet many of the Jews were not converted by these things, but persevered to the last in unbelief.

2. Since the Scriptures often represent things difficult as altogether impossible, the assertion that they who will not hear Moses, would not hear a dead man returned to life, may be supposed to contain in it no more than this general doctrine, that they who have a revealed religion to guide them, and act against the dictates of their own reason, and the testimony of their own conscience, who know

know what is right, and persist in doing what is wrong, are in a condition extremely dangerous, and that there is little hope of their amendment.

A sinner of this kind often doth things which seem very strange, resists the most pressing motives, and acts in a manner for which we can account no other way than from the prodigious force of bad habits.

He believes a God, a revelation, and a future state, and in defiance of that belief he perversely pursues his own ruin. He trusts to an uncertain repentance, and yet he knows that by being delayed it becomes more difficult to be accomplished, and that he may be suddenly taken out of the world. Such is the tyranny of habit, and the custom of suspending and driving away from time to time all serious thoughts, of stifling the reproofs of conscience, and silencing the voice of reason by the assistance of the noise and follies, the hurry and business of the world.

He hath, it may be, the dreadful example of wicked companions cut off in the midst of their iniquity. This affects him, and he instantly resolves to amend. Yet the resolution holds only for a short time, his vices return,

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and not only recover their former dominion, but daily acquire new strength.

At last he is himself surpris'd by sickness or danger, and Death and Hell are before his eyes. His fears are rais'd, his conscience is awaken'd, he mourns, he condemns himself, he is determin'd to become a new man. The danger ceases, and he not only returns to his former ways, but grows worse than he was before.

So little hope there is, so small a chance, so slender a probability, that such a person shall repent and amend his ways, that in the style of the Scriptures, and in the common way of speaking, it may be said of him, that he is dead in trespasses and sins, dead to all that is good; that it is impossible to bring him to a right mind; that sooner may an Æthiopian change his skin, and a leopard his spots, than he become an example of virtue and piety; that one sent to him from the dead would not reclaim him, and that if he had lived in the time of Christ and of the Apostles, the miracles which they wrought would have had no other influence upon him, than they had upon the unbelieving Jews; all which strong and severe expressions amount in reality only to this, that
the

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the condition of such a person is very dangerous, and his recovery scarcely to be expected.

These things were written for our instruction, or, if they fail of producing that effect, for our condemnation. He who can hear this parable of our Saviour, and not be the better for it, more cautious and vigilant, more dutiful to God and useful to his neighbour, is in danger of becoming one of those upon whom even a miracle would be thrown away.

SERMON

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S E R M O N X I X.

MATTH. xxii. 32.

God is not the God of the dead, but of the living.

THESE words being spoken by our Saviour with relation to the Patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, after they were dead, and with a view to establish the doctrines of the soul's immortality, a future state, and a resurrection, I shall take occasion from them to discuss these two important points :

I. That the soul of man subsists after death, and hath some place of abode allotted to it till the resurrection :

II. That this intermediate state is, in all probability, not a state of insensibility to the souls of the righteous ; but of thought and self-consciousness, and consequently of content and of happiness, in a certain degree.

These two propositions I intend to support, not by arguments taken from the light of reason, and from the nature of the soul, considered as an active, simple, uncompound, immaterial substance. Not that I slight those arguments: on the contrary, I think they have much weight and force. But as they are rather of too refined a nature for common use, I shall at present confine myself to proofs taken from revelation, and to the testimonies of Holy Scripture.

There have been Christians, and those serious and good men, who, firmly believing that resurrection, and that life to come which our Saviour hath promised us, yet denied the subsistence, or at least, the sensibility of the soul after the death of the body. They supposed that when the body is dissolved, the soul is extinguished along with it, or that all its operations are entirely suspended; that it sleeps a sleep without dreams, and is to all intents and purposes as though it were not, till the last day shall awaken the dead man, and restore him to himself again.

This is not a novel notion, and the product of our inquisitive times. It was espoused of old by some Christians, though rejected by a great majority,

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majority, and condemned as an heretical doctrine ; and it hath in later times been revived, and recommended to us by persons of piety and of abilities.

I am far from designing to insult these men, or their notions. The intermediate state between death and the resurrection is a subject of inquiry upon which the Scriptures have not said so much as perhaps one could wish. The sacred Writers have not treated the point directly and fully. Only some things have been said by them occasionally, of which a proper use may be made; and these passages are so favourable to us, that I am persuaded the probability lies on our side of the question.

I could produce some passages from the Old Testament, in support of our opinion ; but waving them, I shall consider those which are to be found in the New Testament.

Our Saviour thus admonisheth his disciples ; Fear not them who kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul : but rather fear him, who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.

If the soul hath such a necessary dependence upon the body, that when this dies, that dies with it, then he who kills the body, would with the same stroke kill the soul also. But

our Saviour tells us that this is impossible, because the soul remains after the dissolution of the body, and is out of the reach of human or of created power. If it be said that our Saviour only means the utter and eternal destruction of the soul, which no one can effect, because God hath promised us a resurrection to a second life, this would be a mere shift to avoid the force of a plain text. For in this flat and far-fetched sense, our Lord might as well have denied that men can kill the body, because at the resurrection we shall again consist of soul and body, knowing ourselves to be the same persons that we were before.

Our Saviour himself, at the point of death, said, Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit. And lest we should think this a peculiar privilege belonging to the Son of God, St. Stephen, when dying, having a vision of Jesus Christ standing at God's right hand, addresseth himself to him, and says, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.

Again ; Our Saviour's words to the penitent Thief are express ; Verily I say unto thee, To-day thou shalt be with me in Paradise. Here I must inform you that, in order to elude the force of this text, the persons of the contrary

opinion

opinion alter the stopping, and read it thus; Verily I say unto thee to-day, Thou shalt be with me in Paradise; that is, thou shalt be with me hereafter, some time or other, at the resurrection. But of all such forced interpretations, this seems to be one of the lowest. And what makes it still worse is, that Paradise, as we shall shew, means not the kingdom of heaven, but the place of the good after death, and before the resurrection.

Farther; In the New Testament we read of separate spirits. Of the spirit of good persons departed, the Author of the Epistle to the Hebrews speaks, where he tells us that Christians are joined to the Church Catholic, that is, not only to their brethren upon earth, and to the host of holy Angels, but to the invisible society of the spirits of just men made perfect; who are made perfect, that is, who have finished their course, and accomplished their warfare.

St. Paul also hath informed us that a man, that is, the soul of a man, may be separated from the body, and yet live without it, when he says. We are confident and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord.

He also speaks of some visions and revelations which he had seen and received in Paradise, and in the third heaven; but declares himself doubtful in what situation his soul was at that time; whether in the body, says he, or whether out of the body, I know not; God knoweth. Now if he had believed that the soul could not subsist, or could not act in a state of separation, he might easily have cleared up his own doubts, and have concluded that he was in the body.

In our Saviour's time, the Sadducees and the Pharisees differed greatly concerning the nature of the soul, and its duration and destination. The Sadducees held that the soul was material and mortal, or rather, that a man was nothing more than a living thinking body, who entirely perished when he died. Upon this system of theirs, a resurrection was indeed an impossibility, and mere contradiction. It could only be a new creation of a new creature, which could have no relation to the man that was dead and gone. And in this the Sadducees were consistent with themselves, and drew a just conclusion from false premises. The Pharisees held immaterial and immortal substances, Angels good and evil, and human spirits, or

souls subsisting after death, and therefore capable of being reunited to an human body. Our Saviour decides the question for the Pharisees, and against the Sadducees, from this text of Moses; I am the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, spoken after these holy men were dead; and he builds his argument upon this foundation, God is not the God of the dead, but of the living. If then the souls of these holy men were living, the very foundation of the Sadducean doctrine was overturned, and the doctrine of a resurrection was cleared of the main difficulties, and nothing could be urged by them against it, except one small objection, which our Saviour also condescended to remove. Whose wife, said they, shall the woman be at the resurrection, who had been joined to seven husbands upon earth? In answer to this, he informs them, that after the resurrection to life eternal, there shall be no such connections, but the righteous shall be in a more exalted condition, clothed with spiritualized bodies, wanting no repairs, and liable to no decay.

This seems to be a plain and true account of our Saviour's reasoning upon that famous text, I am the God of Abraham, &c. which some Interpreters have misunderstood, for want of at-

tending to the principles of the Sadducees, against whom he argues. For if his reasoning had been so subtle as they have made it, the common people who stood by would hardly have felt the force of it. But they perceived clearly from the text, as it was explained by him, that the holy Patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, were still alive after the dissolution of their bodies; and they knew that this was an effectual confutation of the Sadducean notion that there was no life besides the present, and that death put an end to the whole man. It hath been said of our Lord's argument, that it proves rather the permanency of the same person, and the life of the soul, than the resurrection of a dead man, according to our common notion of that word. But, first, his argument was fully sufficient to confute the Sadducees with whom he had to do; and, secondly, another living state of the same person, after this, and besides this present state, may justly be called a resurrection, and is as much as the word * *resurrection*, considered in itself, ever implies.

* *Ανάστασις.*

They who in the text above-mentioned look for a proof of the resurrection of that identical body which died, are seeking what they will not find.

Thus

Thus the subsistence of the soul after the death of the body appears to be the doctrine of Christ and of his Apostles delivered in the New Testament. To this it should be added, that the fathers of the Church, who lived in or near the times of the Apostles, were unanimous in this opinion, and persuaded that the soul of every man, upon the dissolution of the body, died not, but had a proper place to go to; and accordingly this doctrine is to be found in the most ancient Christian Liturgies.

This is an argument of weight; for though we are not obliged to adopt all the notions or reasonings which are to be found in the Primitive Fathers, yet a due regard is to be paid to their testimony concerning doctrines which they deliver as received by the Church in their days.

The same opinion was also, by a tradition from the remotest antiquity, adopted by all the civilized heathen nations in Greece, and in the East; and indeed in those parts of the world which have been more lately discovered, in the vast regions of America.

II. Now I proceed to the second proposition, to shew that this intermediate state is in all probability not a state of sleep, for the souls of
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the righteous, but of sensibility, and consequently of content and happiness in a certain degree.

Under this head I observe that as we find many intimations in the Scriptures concerning this state of the good, and hardly any concerning the state of the bad, I shall confine my inquiries to the former; only taking notice of this, that a positive punishment, inflicted by a righteous God, cannot well be supposed to be the lot of wicked souls in their separate state; for the last day being always described to us as the time of trial, sentence, and condemnation to the wicked, this induces us to think that such actual punishment will not be inflicted upon them before that time. It seems therefore more probable that their disquiet, if they feel any, will arise, not from punishment, but from the expectation of it, which is the natural result of a guilty conscience, and is indeed a most disconsolate and miserable situation.

The same thing in the New Testament is intimated concerning evil Spirits, or Devils, namely, that they are reserved, as St. Peter says, to the day of judgment, to be punished; and in St. Matthew, they intreat Christ, not to torment them before the time.

And

And for the same reason, it is likewise to be supposed that the souls of the righteous receive not their proper and intended reward before that day, and that they rest in the joyful expectation of it.

If it be asked how and in what manner the soul acts, whilst it is deprived of the body, whether by its own natural powers, or by more subtle material organs and instruments fitted to its separate state, we must answer with St. Paul, We cannot tell; God knoweth. Even now we are little known to ourselves, and the soul, which is the eye of the mind, is like the eye of the body; it sees other things, but it cannot see itself, its own nature and natural powers. We cannot explain how we see, or hear, or think, or imagine, or understand, or dream, and least of all how we remember; and yet we have a constant experience of all these operations in ourselves. No wonder then that we cannot conceive how our souls can understand and act, when out of the body, since that is a state of which we have had no experience. But the thing itself, that the soul in a state of separation shall have life and perception, this is, as I have shewed, the most obvious and probable sense of some passages in Scripture, and Scripture

ture is our surest guide in this inquiry, and without its help our best philosophy would be precarious and defective.

Let us therefore hear what the Scripture suggests to us in this matter; and here most of the texts which we have already produced to support the first proposition will serve to support the second.

The Scriptures teach us that there are spirits good and evil, who think and act, and yet either are united to no bodies, or have bodies of a quite different kind from ours. Why should not human souls have the same inherent active principle?

St. Paul, who had been taken up into the third heaven, and also into Paradise, declares himself unable to say whether he was in the body, or out of the body, thus manifestly supposing that the soul separated from the body may perceive and know things that are even beyond the apprehensions of living men. For he says, that being thus in Paradise, he heard unspeakable words, which it was not lawful, or rather not possible, for man to utter. So then this paradise is not a place of darkness, silence, and oblivion, where spirits sleep, like some creatures

creatures in their winter-quarters ; but a place of glory, light, and joy.

The same Apostle, whilst he was in the flesh, tells us that he was very desirous to depart, and to be with Jesus Christ, which is far better. Nevertheless, says he, to abide in the flesh is more needful for you. Now how could the Apostle think it far better to depart from the body than to remain in it, if after that departure he should be deprived of all sense and thought ? Is it not better to have our reasoning faculty than to be without it ? Is it not better to serve God in a land of the living, than to sink into a state wherein we can do nothing ? St. Paul surely doth not desire to die, merely to be free from the persecutions and troubles that he underwent, which is the cold exposition of some Commentators ; but he wanted to depart, that he might go to that Paradise again, of which he had been favoured with a sight ; or as he expresses it, to go and be with Christ.

Now certainly a good man hath more communion with Christ, whilst he is serving him here in the flesh, than he would have in a state of insensibility.

Let us hear the same Apostle again. We know, says he, that whilst we are at home, or rather,

rather, whilst we dwell in the body, we are absent from the Lord: we are therefore willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present, or conversant with the Lord.

He speaks here of the state of the Faithful, which commenceth after death, and not of that only which follows the resurrection, since he calls it an absence from the body. He also speaks of other Christians along with himself, that we may not fancy it to be an Apostolical privilege and recompense. There is no joining these declarations to a state of sleep and insensibility, without some far-fetched reasoning, some violence offered to the more obvious sense.

But let us hear our Lord himself. When he was dying, he said to the penitent Thief, To-day thou shalt be with me in Paradise. Here Christ, as a liberal Prince, promiseth more to his humble petitioner, than the man presumed to ask. The request was, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom. The answer was to this effect; I will not put thee off till that day cometh; but I will take thee under my protection this very day. Die securely; thou shalt instantly go along with me to Paradise. To paradise: what place is that? Our Saviour

viour spake these words to a Jew, and intended to be understood by him. From the Jews therefore we must learn the meaning of the word. Paradise originally meant the Garden of Eden, where our first parents dwelt in a state of innocence and happiness. Hence the Jews used this word to represent the place where the souls of the righteous go, when they are separated from the body. They distinguish Paradise from Heaven; and so doth St. Paul, when he speaks of his visions and revelations.

Again, Our Saviour represents Lazarus, as carried after death to Abraham's bosom. This was another name for that state of peace and comfort to which the spirits of the righteous were conveyed.

This doctrine was, as we observed before, constantly received in the primitive Church.

In process of time, some new notions and practices were introduced. First of all prayers for the dead, which indeed is a practice of no small antiquity. But these prayers originally were rather a sort of pious wishes, they were offered in general for all those who died in the faith, that they with those who were still living upon earth might partake together of a joyful
and

and glorious resurrection at the last day. To say the truth, this seems to have been a kind of will-worship, and a practice not commanded in the New Testament.

Then came the doctrine of Purgatory, and the doctrine of praying to departed Saints.

The doctrine of Purgatory was founded upon a supposition that the souls of imperfect Christians go into a state of temporary punishment, and may be relieved by the prayers and other pious ceremonies of the church; and then that those prayers might be purchased by pious legacies; which proved an inexhaustible mine of silver and gold to the Romish Clergy.

Prayers to Saints were founded upon a notion that those holy persons were in heaven, and would there intercede with God for us; of which intercession there is not a shadow of a proof in the Scriptures. The only proof was the testimony of lying miracles, and enthusiastic visions.

This doctrine, you may observe, doth not agree with that of praying for the dead in general, since such prayers for the dead did suppose that they were not admitted into heaven before the resurrection.

Here

Here let me add two or three passages more from the New Testament, relating to the interval between death and the resurrection.

The first is the account of Christ's transfiguration, at which time the Evangelists inform us that Moses and Elias came and conversed with Jesus, and were seen and heard by those disciples who were present. As to Elias, he died not, but, like Enoch before him, was taken up into heaven. But of Moses it is written that he died and was buried. This account therefore is a fair intimation that good men continue to live and to act after they are released from this mortal body.

The other passage is that in the Revelation, which the Church useth in the burial service; I heard a voice from heaven, saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord, yea saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours, and their works do follow them. There is nothing in a state of insensibility that seems to deserve the title of blessedness or happiness; and if we should grant it to be a blessing, the wicked would have it as much as the good during that interval of inactivity. But in the same Book, the souls of the righteous are described as in a waking condition. I saw, says St. John, under the altar the souls of them

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that were slain for the word of God ; and they cried ; How long, O Lord holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood ? And it was said to them that they should still rest for a little season. This is a visionary scene and transaction ; and yet it intimates that these holy Martyrs were in a living state*.

And now I shall make application of the foregoing doctrine, and consider it as matter of hope and consolation to all those who endeavour to obtain and to secure the favour of God,

* As to the condition of the wicked, in the interval of the separate state, there is one passage in the New Testament that seems to relate to it, and that is the parable of the Rich man and Lazarus, where the former is said, after death and before the resurrection, to go into *Hell*, as we translate it ; but the word is not *Gebenna*, it is *Hades*, which means the intermediate state of the dead, and there to be in pain, whilst Lazarus was in Abraham's bosom. This is the only place in the New Testament where *Hades* expressly denotes a state of punishment. But as it is a Parable, and many things in it cannot well be taken according to the letter, the only conclusion that can be drawn from it with full certainty, is the general doctrine of a future state of retribution.

The Apostles, in the first chapter of the Acts, say of Judas, that he was gone to his own place ; but whether that was a place of punishment, or of darkness and silence, it is not said.

Perhaps the matter might be compounded with those who contend for the sleep of the soul, by allowing that whilst the good enter into a state of peace and comfort, the wicked are probably condemned to an insensible condition till the last day calls them forth.

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The reward of eternal life promised to the good at the resurrection, as it is more than the best of men can claim as their due; and the effect of the mere bounty of God, is surely sufficient to encourage and content them. Suppose that when they die they should sleep till the Lord comes and wakes them, yet they should consider that sleep as a rest from trouble, a protection from temptations, a calm repose under the wings of the Almighty. In a sleep without sensation, be it long or short, the interval is as nothing, and in this case a thousand years are as one day, yea as one moment. It is like closing the eyes, and opening them again instantly.

But, as I have been endeavouring to shew you, it is more probable that the interval between death and the resurrection is not a sleep to the servants of Christ, but a removal of the soul to a place called Paradise; it is not a stupid insensible rest, but a rest accompanied with self-consciousness and satisfaction. It is a place of the best society, and the most desirable company, where dwell the spirits of just men, the holy Patriarchs, Apostles, Prophets, Martyrs, Confessors, where the Angels of God go to and fro, and which probably the Son of God himself

sometimes favours with his presence. In that safe retirement there are no wicked intruders to corrupt or insult the inhabitants, no evil Spirits to seduce, no temptations of any kind to make their assaults. It is a place whence sin, and sorrow, and fear are banished, and where there is peace, and love, and hope, and expectation of still greater rewards. If death calls a Christian to such a place, why should he not be willing to go to it, to depart hence, and to be with the Lord?

As to the wicked and impenitent, let them not flatter themselves with the vain hope of sleeping till the day of judgment. If it should be so, the senseless interval as we observed before, doth not in reality remove that fatal hour, but death and the resurrection will seem to them closely united together.

Upon the supposition that death is a state of lethargy overshadowed with profound darkness, till Christ arises, and shines upon it at the last day; upon this supposition, I say, a Christian might more reasonably desire to continue here a little longer, and a little longer, because here he hath some opportunity of doing good, and of being busy in his vocation. Upon the supposition of the Romish Church that after death there follows

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follows a burning fiery furnace, called Purgatory, a Christian might well be afraid to die. But the Scriptures teach us better things ; and therefore let us comfort one another with the words there recorded : and that we may be qualified to enter after death into the regions of peace and hope, and at the general resurrection to meet the Lord, and to enter into his kingdom, let us purify ourselves from evil inclinations and evil practices, that we may find mercy from God, both in the separate state, and at the last day *.

* Some remarks in this Sermon are taken from the Discourses of Bishop Bull on the same subject.

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